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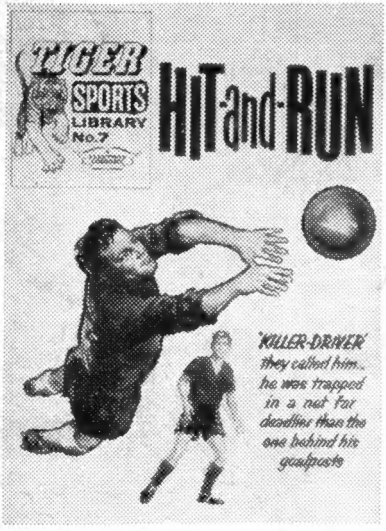
1/-
HEAT OF BATTLE

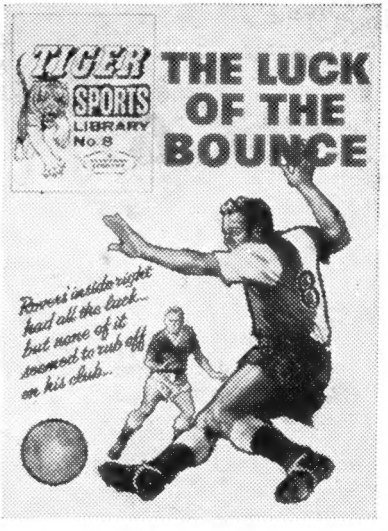
SOCCER ACTION, SOCCER THRILLS . . .

FOLLOW THE FORTUNES OF TWO TRUE-TO-LIFE TEAMS AT OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE FOOTBALL LADDER OF FAME

ON SALE NOW :—

TIGER SPORTS LIBRARY Nos. 7 and 8





No. 7.—**HIT-AND-RUN.** Suspected of having knocked down a child in his powerful vintage sports car, Carford goalie, Ron Towers, faces a bleak future.

No. 8.—**THE LUCK OF THE BOUNCE.** A new star for the Rovers . . . but the star burns too bright for a small town like Bradmere . . .

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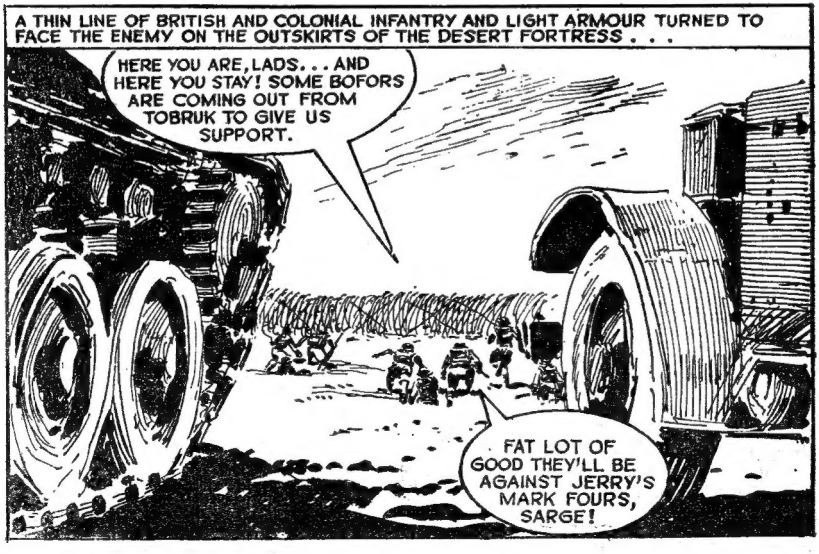
Chapter 1. RELUCTANT GUNNERS

CRASHING THEIR REMORSELESS WAY THROUGH THE BRITISH OUTPOSTS, THE GERMAN ARMOUR HEADED FOR THE PORT OF TOBRUK, STRONGPOINT ON THE COASTAL ROAD TO EGYPT.

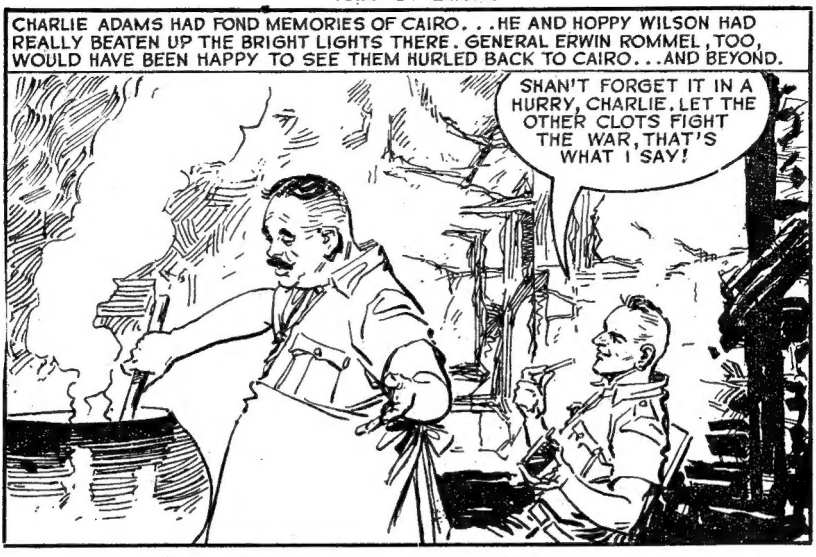
A THIN LINE OF BRITISH AND COLONIAL INFANTRY AND LIGHT ARMOUR TURNED TO FACE THE ENEMY ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE DESERT FORTRESS . . .

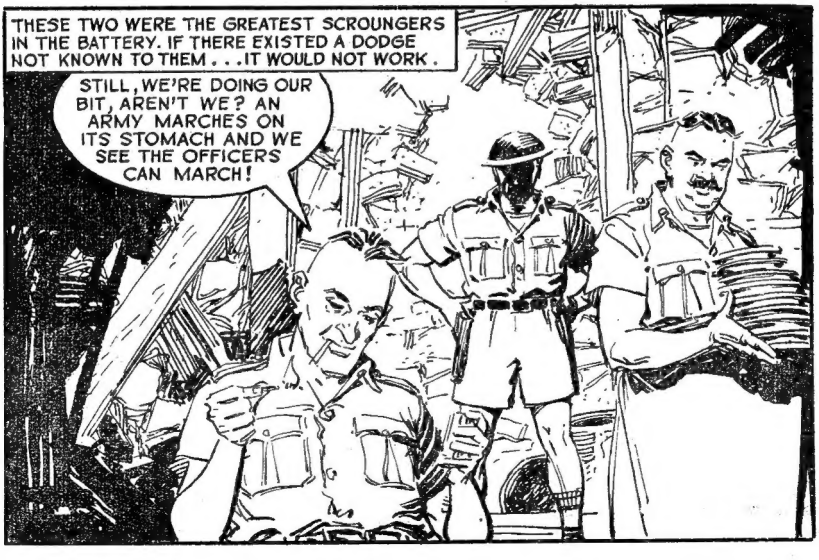


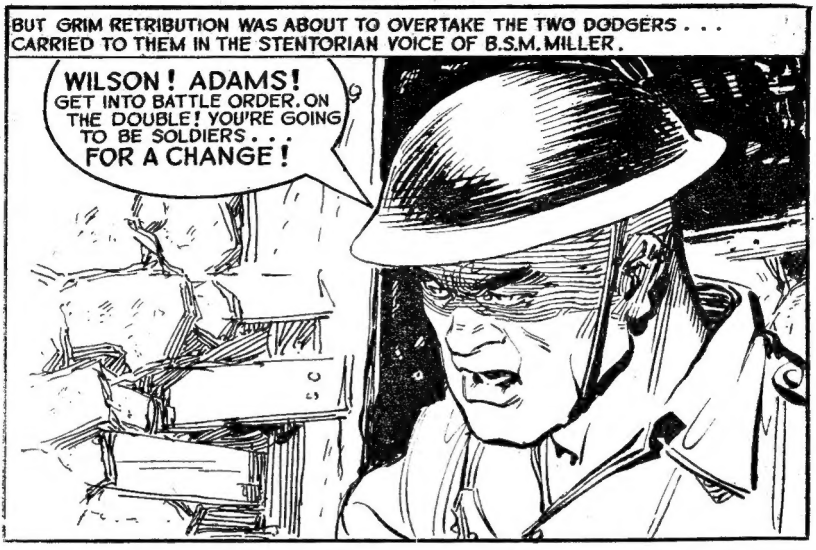
IN TOBRUK, THE 40MM. BOFORS GUNS OF THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEFENCES WERE BEING MADE READY FOR THEIR NEW ROLE.
JUMP TO IT, YOU DOZY LOT! WE CAN'T KEEP ROMMEL WAITING!

BATTERY SERGEANT-MAJOR MILLER'S EYES GLINTED AS HE RECEIVED LAST-MINUTE INSTRUCTIONS FROM MAJOR BOWEN, HIS BATTERY COMMANDER.
EVERY MAN IS NEEDED IF WE'RE TO HOLD TOBRUK AGAIN, MILLER. ROMMEL'S REALLY ON THE WARPATH THIS TIME. ROUND UP ALL THE NON-EFFECTIVES AND ASSIGN THEM TO GUN CREWS.
WITH PLEASURE, SIR!

THE MAJOR CONCEALED A SMILE...HE KNEW HIS B.S.M. OF OLD. HE WOULD HAVE NO MERCY ON THE SKULKERS IN THE BATTERY.
HAVE PLENTY OF ARMOUR-PIERCING ISSUED, B.S.M. WE'LL BE IN ACTION AGAINST TANKS AS WELL AS AIRCRAFT.
THAT'LL UPSET OUR ARTFUL DODGERS, SIR, THAT WILL.
IT WON'T BE PLEASANT FOR ANYONE, MILLER... ESPECIALLY FOR MEN LIKE GUNNER WILSON. HIS FEET HAVE BECOME FAMOUS IN THE REGIMENT, YOU KNOW.
I KNOW ONLY TOO WELL, SIR. WILSON'S BLISTERING FEET HAVE GOT HIM OUT OF MORE WORK THAN I CARE TO THINK ABOUT.
LEISURELY OFFICERS' MESS FATIGUES SUITED HOPPY WILSON VERY WELL, EVEN WITH ROMMEL HAMMERING ON THE GATES OF TOBRUK.
IMAGINE THOSE POOR BLIGHTERS LOADING GUNS IN ALL THIS HEAT. SHOCKING, I CALL IT!
YEAH! CAIRO'S THE PLACE, THOUGH! REMEMBER THAT LEAVE, HOPPY...


CHARLIE ADAMS HAD FOND MEMORIES OF CAIRO. . .HE AND HOPPY WILSON HAD REALLY BEATEN UP THE BRIGHT LIGHTS THERE. GENERAL ERWIN ROMMEL, TOO, WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO SEE THEM HURLED BACK TO CAIRO. . .AND BEYOND.
SHAN'T FORGET IT IN A HURRY, CHARLIE. LET THE OTHER CLOTS FIGHT THE WAR, THAT'S WHAT I SAY!


THESE TWO WERE THE GREATEST SCROUNGERS IN THE BATTERY. IF THERE EXISTED A DODGE NOT KNOWN TO THEM. . . .IT WOULD NOT WORK.
STILL, WE'RE DOING OUR BIT, AREN'T WE? AN ARMY MARCHES ON ITS STOMACH AND WE SEE THE OFFICERS CAN MARCH!


BUT GRIM RETRIBUTION WAS ABOUT TO OVERTAKE THE TWO DODGERS . . .
CARRIED TO THEM IN THE STENTORIAN VOICE OF B.S.M. MILLER.
WILSON! ADAMS! GET INTO BATTLE ORDER. ON THE DOUBLE! YOU'RE GOING TO BE SOLDIERS . . . FOR A CHANGE!

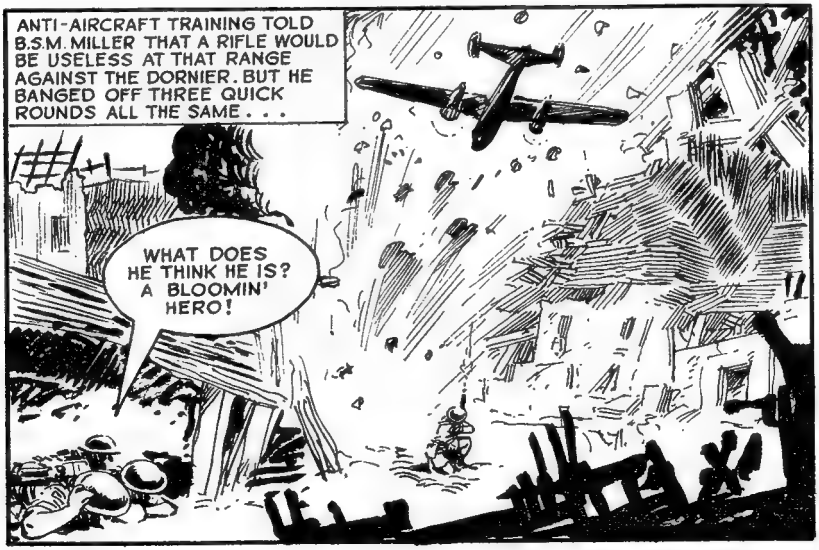
THE BLAST OF AN EIGHTY-EIGHT M.M. COULD NOT HAVE SHAKEN THEM MORE . . .

BUT, SARN'T-MAJOR...
MY FEET! I'M EXCUSED DUTY ...AND THE OFFICERS' GRUB AIN'T READY...

B.S.M. MILLER'S CHIN JUTTED LIKE THE RAM OF A BATTLESHIP. HIS EYES BLAZED. HIS VOICE RASPED THE SKIN OFF THEIR EARDRUMS.
LUMME! THINGS MUST BE BAD IF HOPPY WILSON'S CAUGHT, TOO.
HEDGES WILL KEEP YOU COMPANY. HE'S A DODGER, TOO, BUT HE'S ONLY STUPID. HE'S NOT AS CUNNING AS YOU TWO SCROUNGING TWISTERS.

THINGS WERE BAD. GRIPPED IN AN IRON FIST OF NAZI TANKS AND GUNS, TOBRUK'S DEFENDERS WERE FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIVES . . . AND THEY WERE SOON TO BE JOINED BY GUNNERS WILSON, ADAMS AND HEDGES.
I DIDN'T SIGN UP FOR THIS SORT OF LARK.
BUT, SAR'NT MAJOR, THE OFFICERS'LL WANT THEIR GRUB...
WE'LL ALL BE EATING BULLY AND BISCUITS FROM NOW ON, WILSON... AND TAKE COVER! HERE COMES A JERRY PLANE!

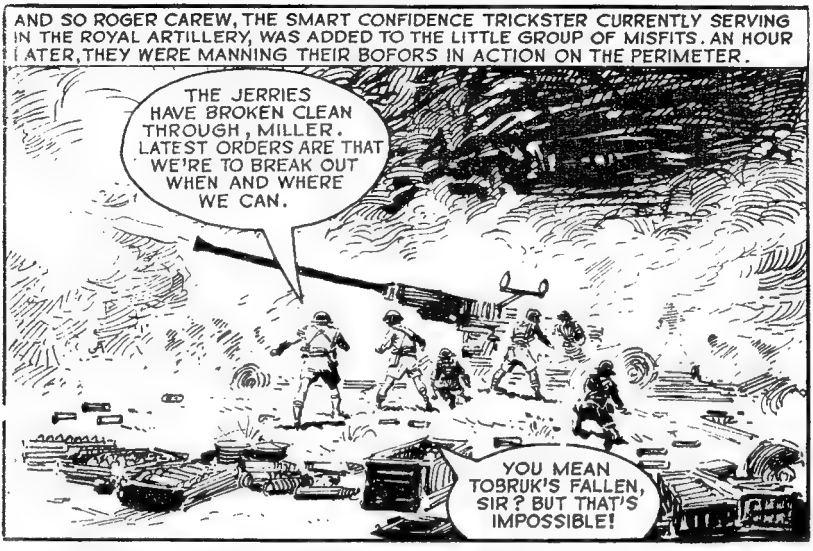
A DORNIER 217 MADE A DETERMINED RUN DESPITE THE FURY OF ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE THAT BURST ABOUT IT.
TAKE ME BACK TO CAIRO.
HIT THE DIRT, MATES!

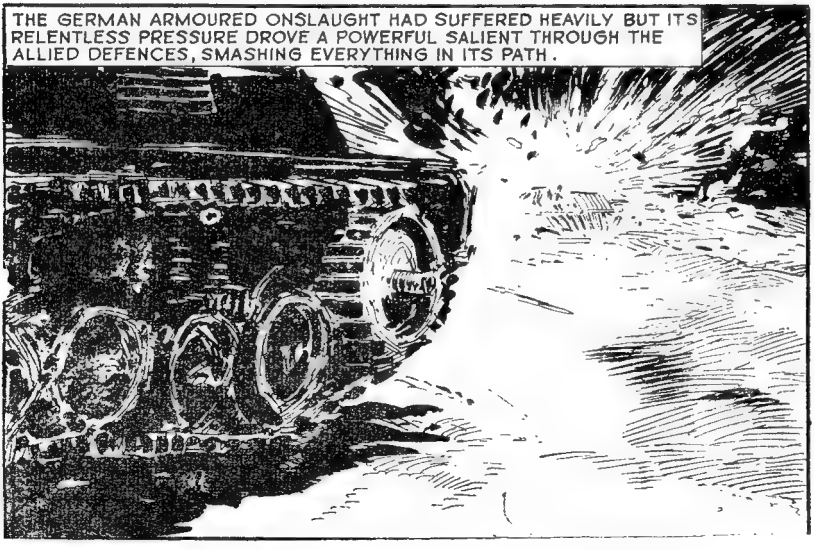

ANTI-AIRCRAFT TRAINING TOLD B.S.M. MILLER THAT A RIFLE WOULD BE USELESS AT THAT RANGE AGAINST THE DORNIER. BUT HE BANGED OFF THREE QUICK ROUNDS ALL THE SAME . . .
WHAT DOES HE THINK HE IS? A BLOOMIN' HERO!

GOOD MEN WERE DYING IN TOBRUK. B.S.M. MILLER SPAT THE DUST FROM HIS MOUTH, FLUNG HEDGES BACK HIS RIFLE AND RASPED A SAVAGE COMMAND . . .
JUST ONE MORE OF YOU SKULKERS THEN WE'LL STICK YOU ON A BOFORS. THAT HIGH-FALUTIN' GUNNER CAREW IN THE BATTERY OFFICE IS THE LAD I WANT!

IN THE BOMB-PROOF CELLAR THAT SERVED AS BATTERY OFFICE, SAT THE IMMACULATE GUNNER ROGER CAREW.
AH, ANOTHER NICE LITTLE HELPING OF FORMS TO KEEP MY PAPER EMPIRE GOING. I'LL SOON HAVE SO MUCH RED TAPE WRAPPED AROUND 'EM THEY'LL NEVER DARE ASK ME TO GO BACK TO THE GUNS.

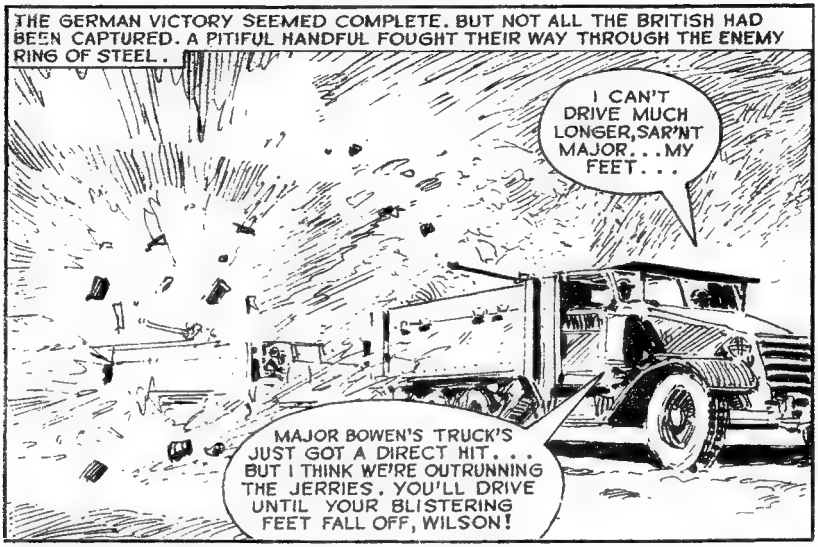
BUT REAL EMPIRES AS WELL AS PAPER ONES WERE TOTTERING THAT DAY OF WRATH. B.S.M. MILLER SPOKE TO GUNNER ROGER CAREW IN A STRANGE, COOING VOICE, SOFT AND FRIENDLY. . .
HULLO, SAR'NT MAJOR. PRETTY BRISK OUT TODAY. . .
VERY BRISK, GUNNER CAREW. I'D JUST LIKE YOU TO GET INTO BATTLE ORDER AND FALL IN OUTSIDE. . .
GUNNER CAREW THOUGHT JOKES WERE FOR THE INFANTILE. HE STARED AT THE B.S.M., PUZZLED.
BUT, SAR'NT MAJOR! I DON'T UNDERSTAND. ALL THE OFFICE WORK. . .
WE'LL BURN THE LOT! BATTLE ORDER! OUTSIDE, AT THE DOUBLE! THAT'S AN ORDER YOU WON'T WRIGGLE OUT OF FOR ONCE. UNDERSTAND?


AND SO ROGER CAREW, THE SMART CONFIDENCE TRICKSTER CURRENTLY SERVING IN THE ROYAL ARTILLERY, WAS ADDED TO THE LITTLE GROUP OF MISFITS. AN HOUR LATER, THEY WERE MANNING THEIR BOFORS IN ACTION ON THE PERIMETER.
THE JERRIES HAVE BROKEN CLEAN THROUGH, MILLER. LATEST ORDERS ARE THAT WE'RE TO BREAK OUT WHEN AND WHERE WE CAN.
YOU MEAN TOBRUK'S FALLEN, SIR? BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!


THE GERMAN ARMOURED ONSLAUGHT HAD SUFFERED HEAVILY BUT ITS RELENTLESS PRESSURE DROVE A POWERFUL SALIENT THROUGH THE ALLIED DEFENCES, SMASHING EVERYTHING IN ITS PATH.

AT LAST ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS HAD CAPTURED THE FORTRESS THAT HAD WITHSTOOD THEM FOR SO LONG.
THE BRITISH ARE BEATEN! NOW WE HURL THEM BACK TO THE CANAL.

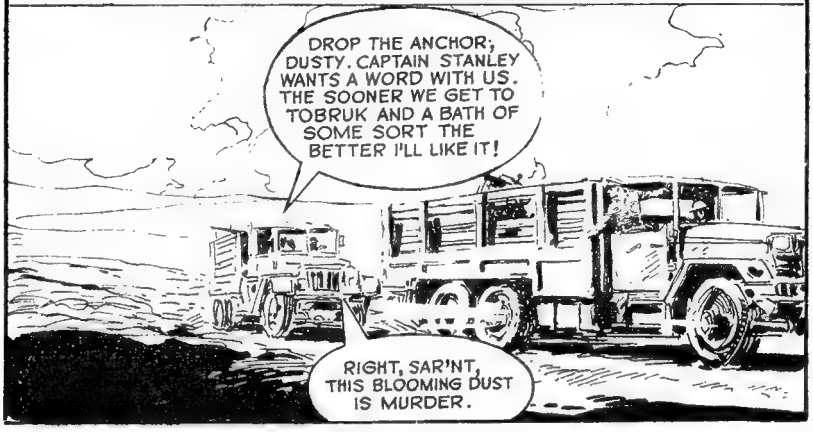
THE GALLANT BUT DISORGANISED DEFENDERS FOUGHT ALL THAT DAY AND NIGHT, AMIDST CHAOS AND DESTRUCTION. BUT AT LAST, ALL RESISTANCE CEASED . . .
FALL IN HERE, ENGLANDERS! YOU WILL BE TREATED CORRECTLY AS PRISONERS OF WAR ACCORDING TO THE RULES OF WAR!


THE GERMAN VICTORY SEEMED COMPLETE. BUT NOT ALL THE BRITISH HAD BEEN CAPTURED. A PITIFUL HANDFUL FOUGHT THEIR WAY THROUGH THE ENEMY RING OF STEEL.
I CAN'T DRIVE MUCH LONGER, SAR'NT MAJOR... MY FEET...
MAJOR BOWEN'S TRUCK'S JUST GOT A DIRECT HIT... BUT I THINK WE'RE OUTRUNNING THE JERRIES. YOU'LL DRIVE UNTIL YOUR BLISTERING FEET FALL OFF, WILSON!

DUST, FLAME AND SMOKE HAD BLINDED AND DEAFENED HOPPY WILSON. HE WAS NOT A HAPPY MAN.
I CAN'T SEE ANYONE ELSE! WE'RE LOST!
WE'RE NOT LOST YET, WILSON! WE'RE HEADING AWAY FROM THE JERRIES... SOUTH AND THEN EAST. THAT WAY WE'LL AVOID THEIR PATROLS. NOW STEP ON IT AND STOP WHINING!

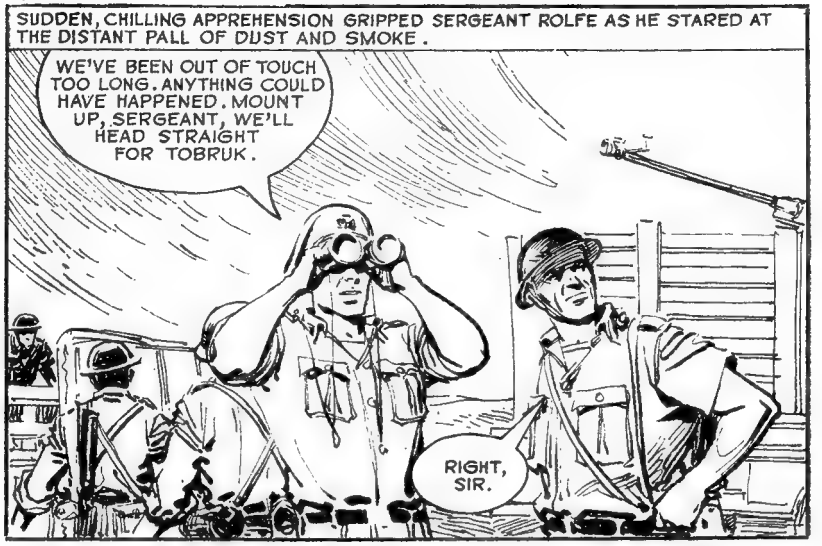
Chapter 2. DESERT WOLF

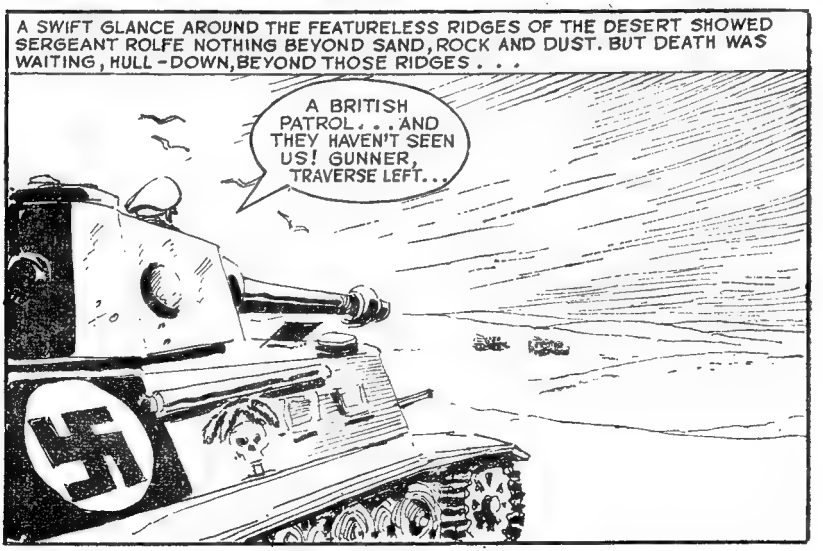
SOME MILES TO THE SOUTH AND EAST OF FALLEN TOBRUK, A PATROL OF THE LONG-RANGE DESERT GROUP MOTORED CHEERFULLY BACK AFTER A SUCCESSFUL RAID.

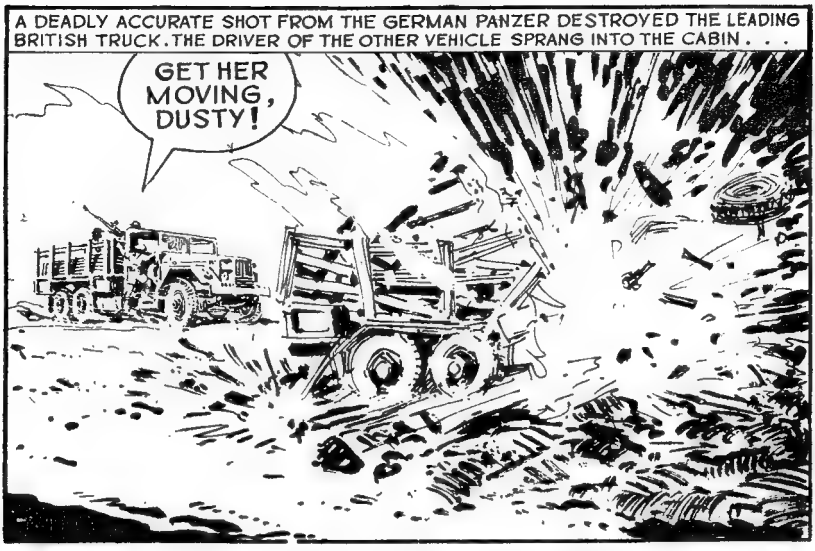


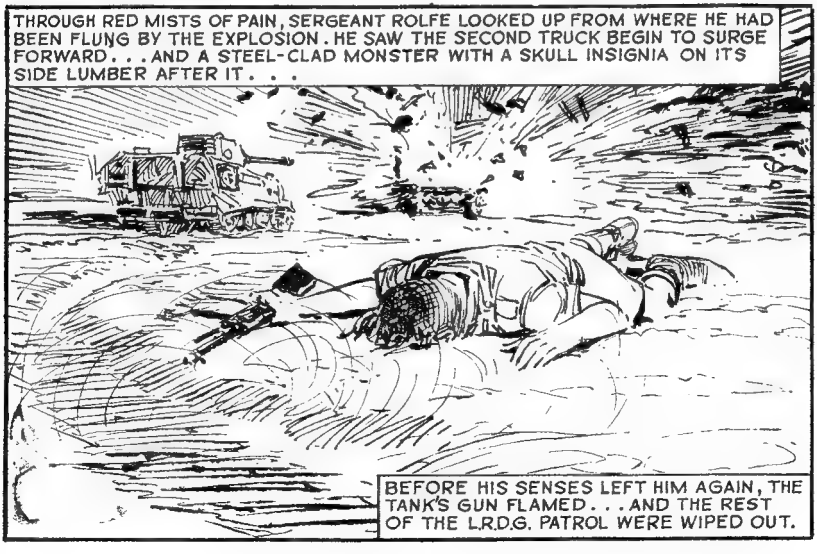
SERGEANT ROLFE, TOUGH, WHIPCORD LEAN, ENJOYED RAIDING DEEP INTO ENEMY TERRITORY. HE LIKED THE MEN WITH WHOM HE WORKED AND HE RESPECTED THEIR LEADER, CAPTAIN STANLEY.

THE INFERNO OVER TOBRUK WAS VISIBLE MILES INTO THE DESERT. THE L.R.D.G. PATROL CONFERRED, WONDERING . . .

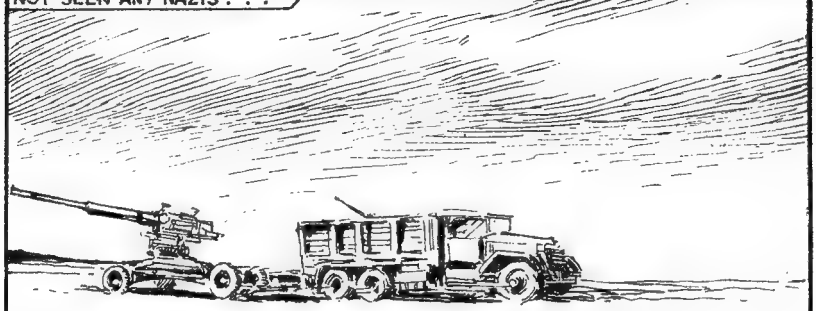

SUDDEN, CHILLING APPREHENSION GRIPPED SERGEANT ROLFE AS HE STARED AT THE DISTANT PALL OF DUST AND SMOKE.
WE'VE BEEN OUT OF TOUCH TOO LONG. ANYTHING COULD HAVE HAPPENED. MOUNT UP, SERGEANT, WE'LL HEAD STRAIGHT FOR TOBRUK.
RIGHT, SIR.

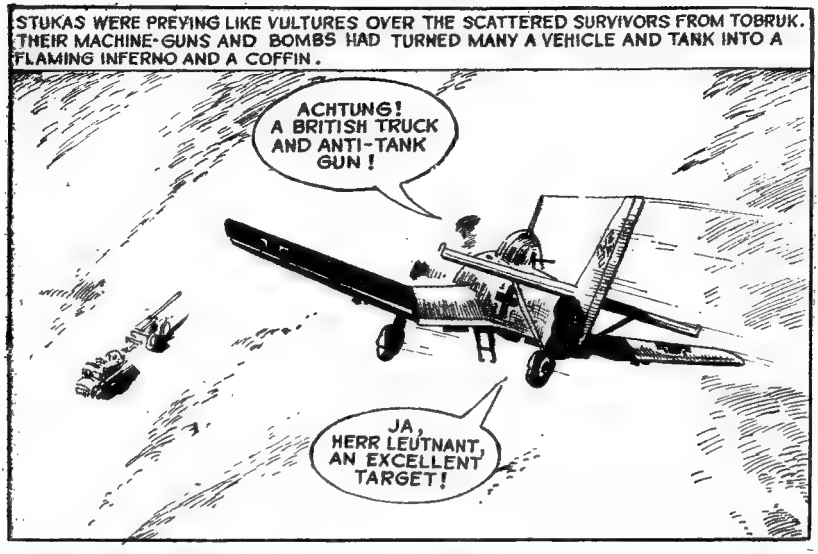

A SWIFT GLANCE AROUND THE FEATURELESS RIDGES OF THE DESERT SHOWED SERGEANT ROLFE NOTHING BEYOND SAND, ROCK AND DUST. BUT DEATH WAS WAITING, HULL-DOWN, BEYOND THOSE RIDGES . . .
A BRITISH PATROL . . . AND THEY HAVEN'T SEEN US! GUNNER, TRAVERSE LEFT . . .

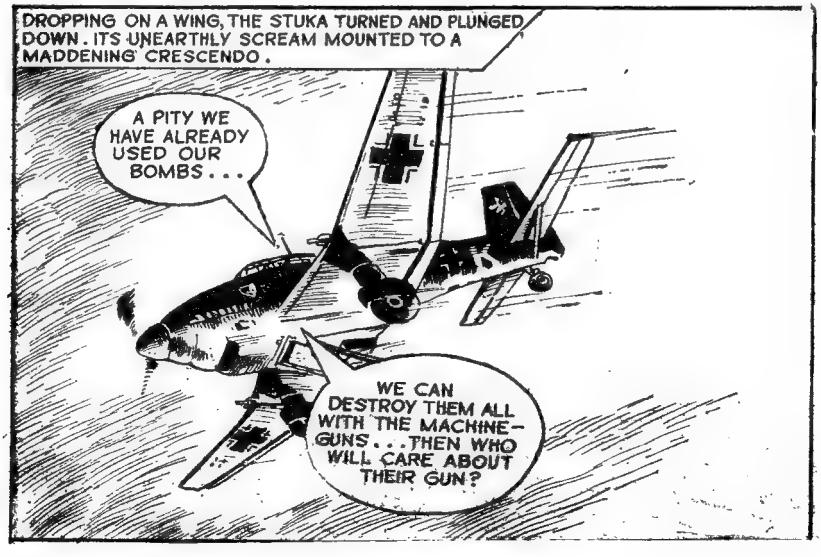

A DEADLY ACCURATE SHOT FROM THE GERMAN PANZER DESTROYED THE LEADING BRITISH TRUCK. THE DRIVER OF THE OTHER VEHICLE SPRANG INTO THE CABIN . . .
GET HER MOVING, DUSTY!

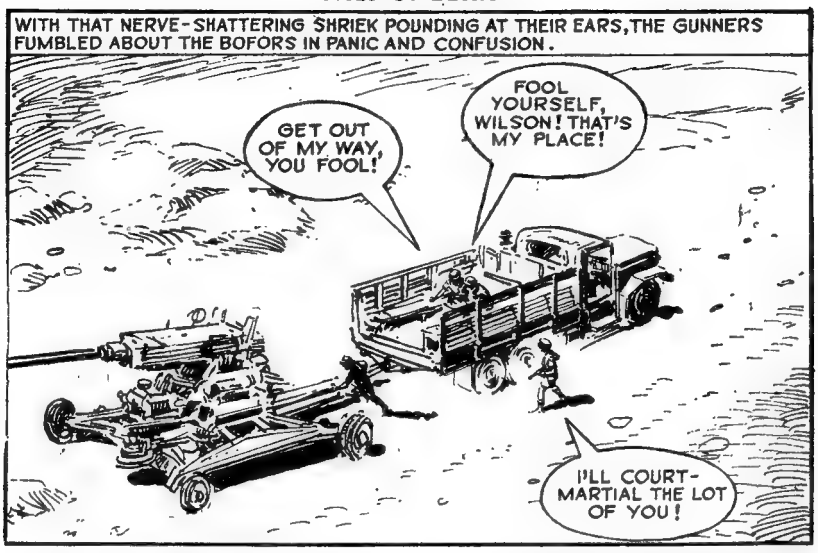

THROUGH RED MISTS OF PAIN, SERGEANT ROLFE LOOKED UP FROM WHERE HE HAD BEEN FLUNG BY THE EXPLOSION. HE SAW THE SECOND TRUCK BEGIN TO SURGE FORWARD . . . AND A STEEL-CLAD MONSTER WITH A SKULL INSIGNIA ON ITS SIDE LUMBER AFTER IT . . .
BEFORE HIS SENSES LEFT HIM AGAIN, THE TANK'S GUN FLAMED . . . AND THE REST OF THE L.R.D.G. PATROL WERE WIPED OUT.

NO SOUND OF THAT BRIEF, DISASTROUS ACTION REACHED THE EARS OF THE BOFORS' GUN CREW AS THEY BOUNCED AND LURCHED ACROSS THE DESERT. SO FAR THEY HAD NOT SEEN ANY NAZIS . . .

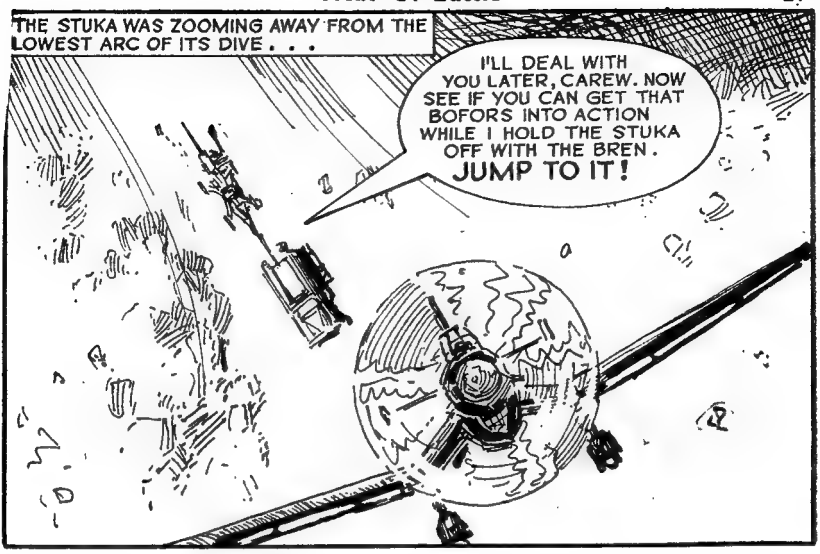


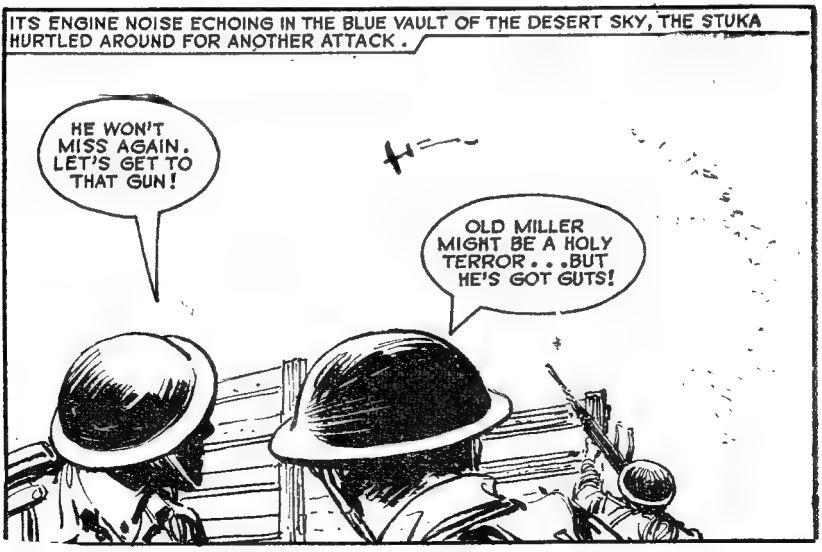

STUKAS WERE PREYING LIKE VULTURES OVER THE SCATTERED SURVIVORS FROM TOBRUK. THEIR MACHINE-GUNS AND BOMBS HAD TURNED MANY A VEHICLE AND TANK INTO A FLAMING INFERNO AND A COFFIN.
ACHTUNG! A BRITISH TRUCK AND ANTI-TANK GUN!
JA, HERR LEUTNANT, AN EXCELLENT TARGET!


DROPPING ON A WING, THE STUKA TURNED AND PLUNGED DOWN. ITS UNEARTHLY SCREAM MOUNTED TO A MADDENING CRESCENDO.
A PITY WE HAVE ALREADY USED OUR BOMBS...
WE CAN DESTROY THEM ALL WITH THE MACHINE-GUNS...THEN WHO WILL CARE ABOUT THEIR GUN?

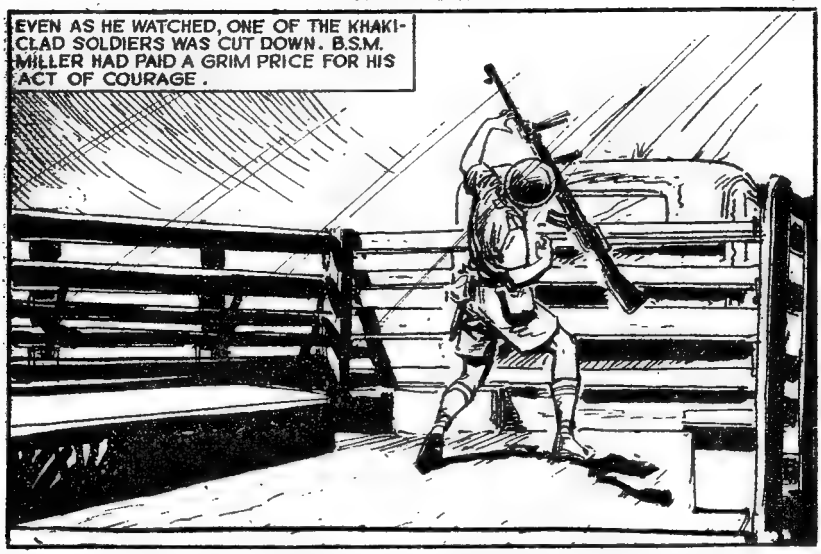

WITH THAT NERVE-SHATTERING SHRIEK POUNDING AT THEIR EARS, THE GUNNERS FUMBLED ABOUT THE BOFORS IN PANIC AND CONFUSION.
GET OUT OF MY WAY, YOU FOOL!
FOOL YOURSELF, WILSON! THAT'S MY PLACE!
I'LL COURT-MARTIAL THE LOT OF YOU!

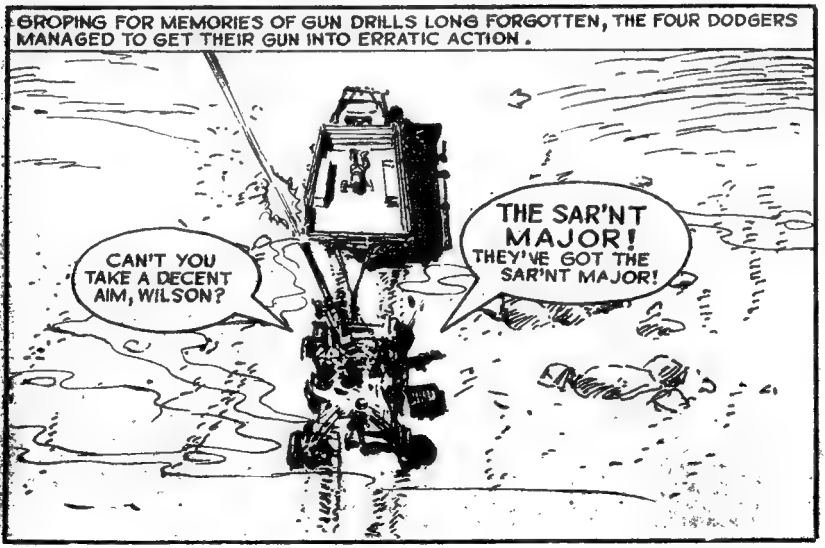
BULLETS CRACKED AND SLAMMED ACROSS THE GEAR IN THE TRUCK, THUDDED INTO THE SAND NEARBY.
WHO GAVE YOU ORDERS TO LEAVE YOUR POST, CAREW? YOU SHOULD BE AT THE BREN!
I'D BE DEAD IF I'D STAYED!


THE STUKA WAS ZOOMING AWAY FROM THE LOWEST ARC OF ITS DIVE . . .
I'LL DEAL WITH YOU LATER, CAREW. NOW SEE IF YOU CAN GET THAT BOFORS INTO ACTION WHILE I HOLD THE STUKA OFF WITH THE BREN. JUMP TO IT!


ITS ENGINE NOISE ECHOING IN THE BLUE VAULT OF THE DESERT SKY, THE STUKA HURTLED AROUND FOR ANOTHER ATTACK.
HE WON'T MISS AGAIN. LET'S GET TO THAT GUN!
OLD MILLER MIGHT BE A HOLY TERROR . . . BUT HE'S GOT GUTS!

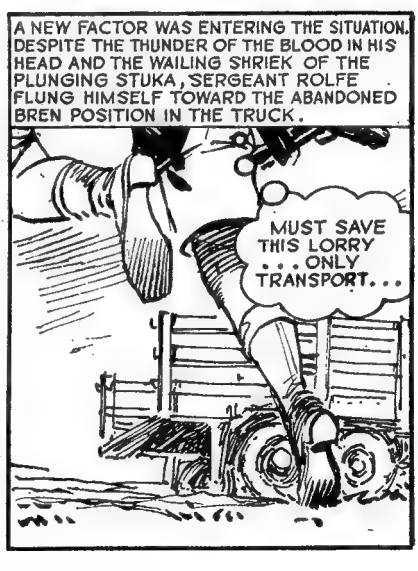
THE ROAR AND CLATTER OF THE ATTACK HAD REACHED OTHER EARS THAN THOSE OF THE BOFORS CREW. THE HARSH SOUND OF GUNFIRE HAD SHOCKED THROUGH TO A PAIN-DULLED BRAIN . . .
AGONISINGLY, SERGEANT ROLFE DRAGGED HIS ACHING HEAD ERECT . . .
CAN'T SEE PROPERLY . . . MY HEAD . . .
SLOWLY HIS DUST-INFLAMED EYES FOCUSED AND TOOK IN THE SCENE.
A TRUCK! TRANSPORT! BUT THEY'RE IN TROUBLE, DEAD TROUBLE!

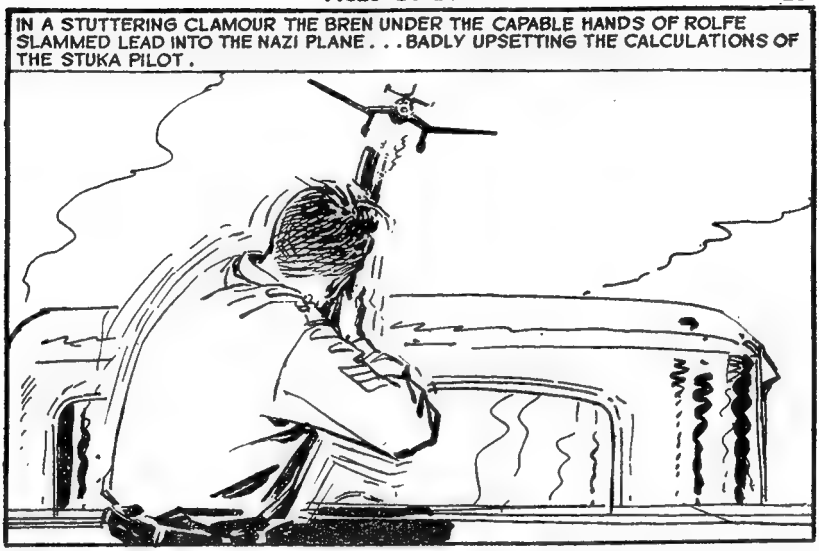

EVEN AS HE WATCHED, ONE OF THE KHAKI-CLAD SOLDIERS WAS CUT DOWN. B.S.M. MILLER HAD PAID A GRIM PRICE FOR HIS ACT OF COURAGE.

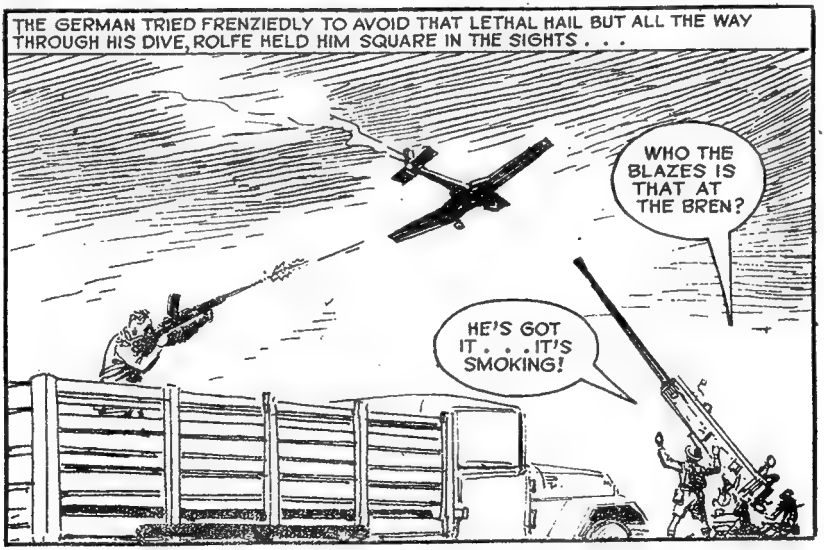

GROPING FOR MEMORIES OF GUN DRILLS LONG FORGOTTEN, THE FOUR DODGERS MANAGED TO GET THEIR GUN INTO ERRATIC ACTION.
CAN'T YOU TAKE A DECENT AIM, WILSON?
THE SAR'NT MAJOR!
THEY'VE GOT THE SAR'NT MAJOR!

THE PILOT OF THE STUKA SWUNG REMORSELESSLY FOR ANOTHER PASS AND THE BOFORS FIRST CLIP OF SHELLS MISSED BY A MILE!
PERISHING FINE SHOTS YOU ARE!
YOU'RE THE ONE OFF, WILSON! I'VE GOT HIM SQUARE IN MY SIGHTS.

THE CRANKED-WING DIVE-BOMBER FELL OFF ON A WING FOR THE LAST, SHATTERING DIVE . . .
HIMMEL! IF THAT'S THE WAY THE BRITISH ARMY SHOOTS WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR, HERR LEUTNANT.
THEY COULDN'T HIT A BALLOON! THIS DIVE WILL FINISH THEM OFF!


A NEW FACTOR WAS ENTERING THE SITUATION. DESPITE THE THUNDER OF THE BLOOD IN HIS HEAD AND THE WAILING SHRIEK OF THE PLUNGING STUKA, SERGEANT ROLFE FLUNG HIMSELF TOWARD THE ABANDONED BREN POSITION IN THE TRUCK.
MUST SAVE THIS LORRY . . . ONLY TRANSPORT . . .


IN A STUTTERING CLAMOUR THE BREN UNDER THE CAPABLE HANDS OF ROLFE SLAMMED LEAD INTO THE NAZI PLANE . . . BADLY UPSETTING THE CALCULATIONS OF THE STUKA PILOT .


THE GERMAN TRIED FRENZIEDLY TO AVOID THAT LETHAL HAIL BUT ALL THE WAY THROUGH HIS DIVE, ROLFE HELD HIM SQUARE IN THE SIGHTS . . .
WHO THE BLAZES IS THAT AT THE BREN?
HE'S GOT IT . . . IT'S SMOKING!

THE DIVE BOMBER'S BANSHEE WAIL ROSE UNBEARABLY UNTIL IN A TREMENDOUS CONCUSSION, IT BURIED ITS PROPELLER DEEP INTO THE SAND AND ERUPTED INTO A FOUNTAIN OF FLAME.

SERGEANT ROLFE CLIMBED WEARILY DOWN FROM THE BREN. HIS WHOLE BODY ACHED. BUT HE WAS ALIVE . . . AND HE HAD TRANSPORT.
DARN GOOD SHOOTING, SARGE!
WHERE THE HECK DID YOU SPRING FROM, SARGE?
RIGHT NOW I NEED A DRINK OF WATER . . . THEN I'LL PUT YOU IN THE PICTURE!

Chapter 3. The LONG TREK

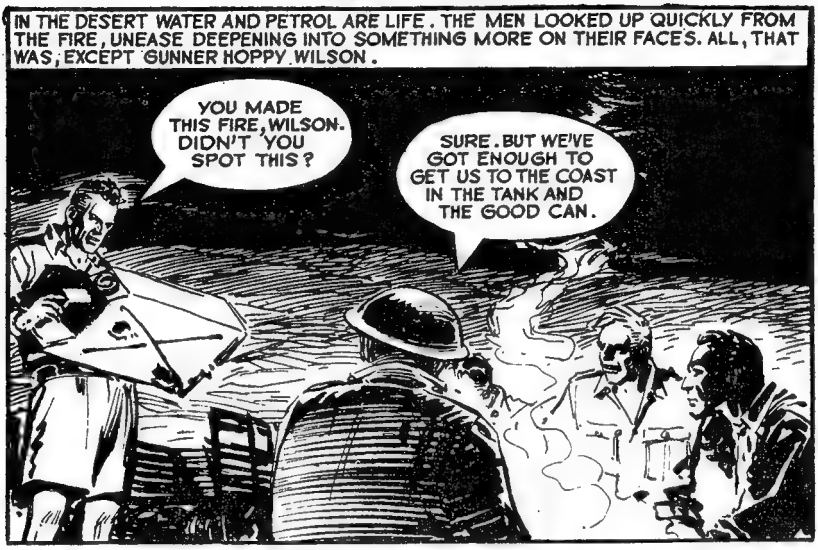
SERGEANT ROLFE'S STORY IMPRESSED THE DODGERS BUT THEIR STORY THAT TOBRUK HAD FALLEN AND THE EIGHTH ARMY WAS IN RETREAT SHOCKED ROLFE. IT WAS A SOMBRE GROUP THAT STARTED OFF AGAIN ACROSS THE DESERT, TOWING THE BOFORS.

ALL THAT BURNING DAY THE LORRY PLUNGED ON ACROSS THE SAND, HEADED EAST. BEHIND IT, A DEAD WEIGHT THAT HAMPERED THEIR PROGRESS, LUMBERED THE GUN ...

IF TOBRUK'S GONE, WE'D BETTER STRIKE AS FAR EAST AS WE CAN BEFORE TURNING FOR THE COAST.

THAT BOFORS IS SLOWING US DOWN. WHY DON'T WE DITCH IT.

THE SUGGESTION ANNOYED ROLFE, WHO COULD NOT HELP THINKING OF CAPTAIN STANLEY, BUTCHERED WITH ALL HIS COMRADES BY A PROWLING NAZI PANZER WITH A DEATH'S HEAD FLAUNTED ON ITS PLATING.
ARE YOU CRAZY, WILSON? THAT BOFORS MIGHT SAVE OUR NECKS YET. ESPECIALLY IF WE RUN INTO SOME JERRIES I HAVE IN MIND . . .
SOMEHOW, SERGEANT ROLFE BLAMED HIMSELF FOR THE DEATHS OF CAPTAIN STANLEY AND HIS COMRADES. HE HAD FAILED TO SPOT THAT NAZI ARMOURED VEHICLE . . .
WE KEEP THE GUN, WILSON . . . AND WE USE IT TO KILL NAZIS! AND YOU MIGHT REMEMBER TO CALL ME SERGEANT.
ALL RIGHT, SERGEANT.
THEY STOPPED FOR AN HOUR AT SUNSET AND BREWED UP WHILE THE SERGEANT CHECKED THE ARMOUR-PIERCING AMMUNITION.
THAT STUKA GOT THE PETROL CANS! THERE'S ONLY ONE INTACT!


IN THE DESERT WATER AND PETROL ARE LIFE. THE MEN LOOKED UP QUICKLY FROM THE FIRE, UNEASE DEEPENING INTO SOMETHING MORE ON THEIR FACES. ALL, THAT WAS, EXCEPT GUNNER HOPPY WILSON.
YOU MADE THIS FIRE, WILSON. DIDN'T YOU SPOT THIS?
SURE. BUT WE'VE GOT ENOUGH TO GET US TO THE COAST IN THE TANK AND THE GOOD CAN.

THE TASTE OF THE TEA IN HIS MOUTH. . . HOT FROM A FIRE MADE WITH PRECIOUS PETROL. . . SICKENED ROLFE.
WHAT SORT OF SOLDIER ARE YOU, WILSON? SURE WE MIGHT GET TO THE COAST: BUT WE'LL PROBABLY HAVE TO FIGHT OUR WAY THROUGH. . .
WE NEEDED THE TEA, DIDN'T WE? WE'LL FIGHT ALL THE BETTER IF OUR STOMACHS ARE FULL.

STRANGE WORDS FROM HOPPY WILSON! EVEN AS HE SPOKE, WILSON WAS MENTALLY EXCLUDING HIMSELF FROM THOSE WHO WOULD FIGHT. SERGEANT ROLFE SPOKE QUIETLY, BUT THE MEN JUMPED TO OBEY HIM AS THEY NEVER HAD B.S.M. MILLER.
DOUSE THAT FIRE AND CLIMB ABOARD. IF ANY ONE OF YOU PLAYS A SILLY TRICK LIKE THAT AGAIN, HEAVEN HELP YOU!

THEIR PETROL . . . INCLUDING THAT STILL SLOPPING IN THE PUNCTURED CANS . . . MIGHT FETCH THEM TO THE COAST IF THEY DID NOT DETOUR TOO FAR.
IT'S YOUR TURN TO DRIVE WHEN IT GETS REAL DARK, CAREW.
SHOULD I DITCH THE BOFORS? NO! CAPTAIN STANLEY AND THE OLD TEAM MIGHT HAVE STOOD A CHANCE IF WE'D HAD A BOFORS . . . AND IF I'D SPOTTED THAT DEATH'S HEAD NAZI!

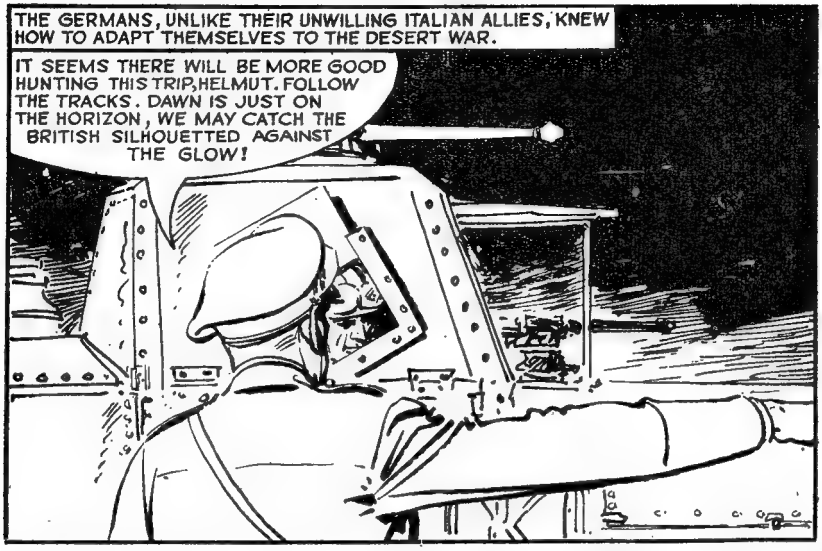
AND SO, ONCE MORE THE BOFORS TRUNDLED AWAY INTO THE DESERT WASTES, UNDER THE COMMAND OF A MAN OF STERN RESOLUTION.

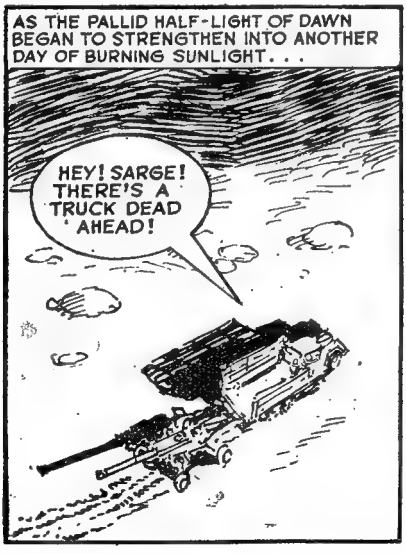
BUT THOSE SANDY WASTES WERE NOT SO EMPTY AS THEY SEEMED . . .

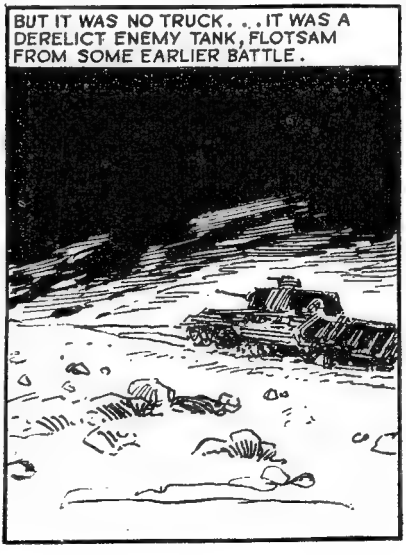
FLUSHED WITH VICTORY, PANZER UNITS OF THE AFRIKA KORPS SCOUTED FAR AND DEEP INTO THE DESERT, CLEARING THE NAZI FLANK. ONE ARMOURED PATROL HAD ALREADY CHALKED UP A VICTORY AND WAS HUNGRY FOR MORE.

BRITISH TYRE TRACKS, HERR HAUPTMANN.

A FEW OF THE RATS ESCAPED FROM THE DESTRUCTION OF TOBRUK, THEN. GOOD! WE WILL HUNT THEM DOWN!

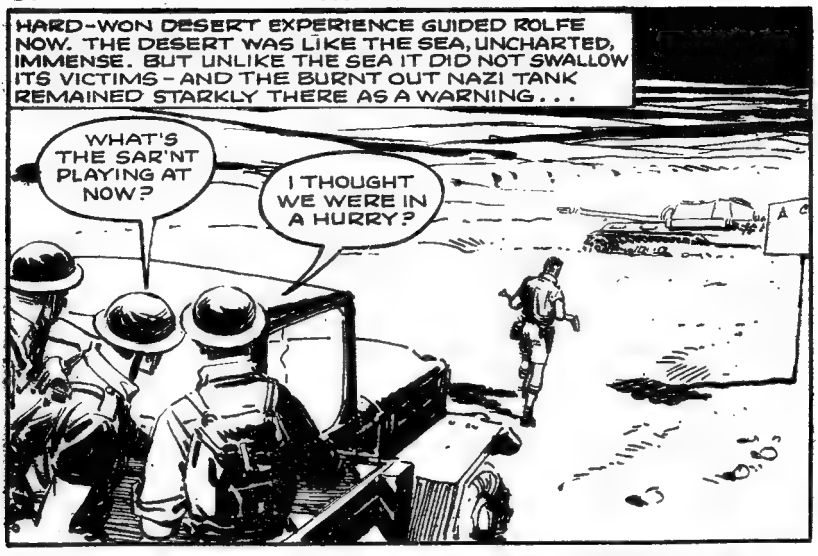

THE GERMANS, UNLIKE THEIR UNWILLING ITALIAN ALLIES, KNEW HOW TO ADAPT THEMSELVES TO THE DESERT WAR.
IT SEEMS THERE WILL BE MORE GOOD HUNTING THIS TRIP, HELMUT. FOLLOW THE TRACKS. DAWN IS JUST ON THE HORIZON, WE MAY CATCH THE BRITISH SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE GLOW!

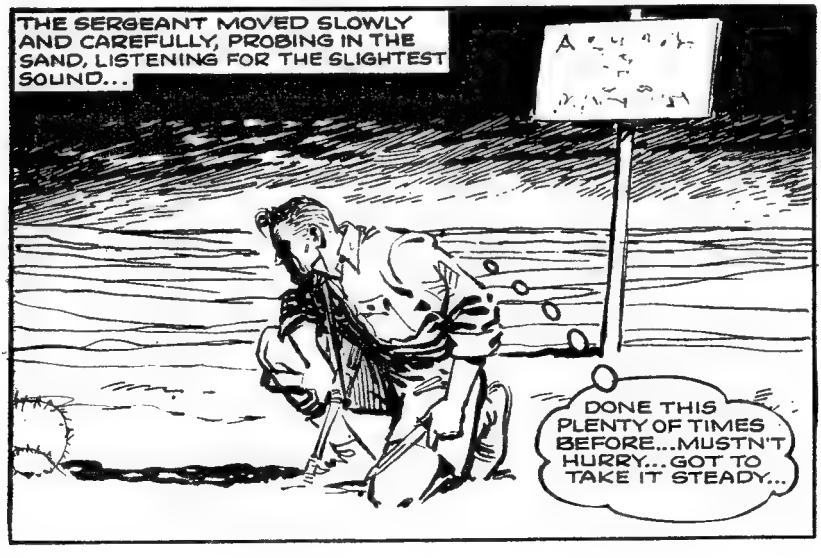

AS THE PALLID HALF-LIGHT OF DAWN BEGAN TO STRENGTHEN INTO ANOTHER DAY OF BURNING SUNLIGHT. . .
HEY! SARGE! THERE'S A TRUCK DEAD AHEAD!

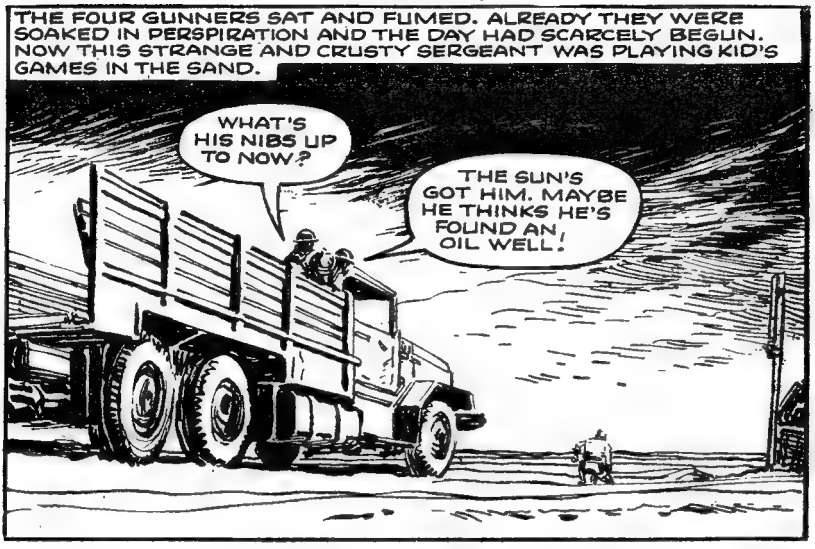

BUT IT WAS NO TRUCK. . . IT WAS A DERELICT ENEMY TANK, FLOTSAM FROM SOME EARLIER BATTLE.

SERGEANT ROLFE'S EYES CREASED SPECULATIVELY AS HE SURVEYED THE BURNT-OUT PANZER.
TRUCK, HEDGES? SUPPOSE THAT PANZER HADN'T BEEN BREWED-UP?
MAYBE WE COULD TAKE PETROL FROM THE WRECK...
DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A TANK BREWS-UP, WILSON? PETROL AND AMMO - THE LOT GO UP!

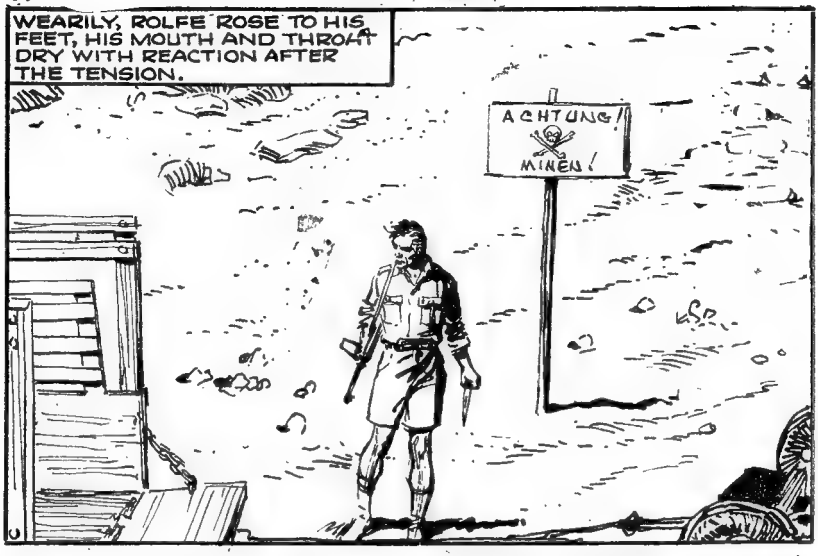
THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THAT SOLITARY WRECK IN THE DESERT DISTURBING TO ROLFE..HIS TIRED BRAIN GRAPPLED WITH THE PROBLEM - THEN HE KNEW THE GRIM ANSWER...
DRIVE SLOWLY BEHIND ME, ADAMS - AND GIVE ME A BAYONET, ONE OF YOU!


HARD-WON DESERT EXPERIENCE GUIDED ROLFE NOW. THE DESERT WAS LIKE THE SEA, UNCHARTED, IMMENSE. BUT UNLIKE THE SEA IT DID NOT SWALLOW ITS VICTIMS - AND THE BURNT OUT NAZI TANK REMAINED STARKLY THERE AS A WARNING...
WHAT'S THE SAR'NT PLAYING AT NOW?
I THOUGHT WE WERE IN A HURRY?


THE SERGEANT MOVED SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY, PROBING IN THE SAND, LISTENING FOR THE SLIGHTEST SOUND...
DONE THIS PLENTY OF TIMES BEFORE...MUSTN'T HURRY...GOT TO TAKE IT STEADY...


THE FOUR GUNNERS SAT AND FUMED. ALREADY THEY WERE SOAKED IN PERSPIRATION AND THE DAY HAD SCARCELY BEGUN. NOW THIS STRANGE AND CRUSTY SERGEANT WAS PLAYING KID'S GAMES IN THE SAND.
WHAT'S HIS NIBS UP TO NOW?
THE SUN'S GOT HIM. MAYBE HE THINKS HE'S FOUND AN OIL WELL!

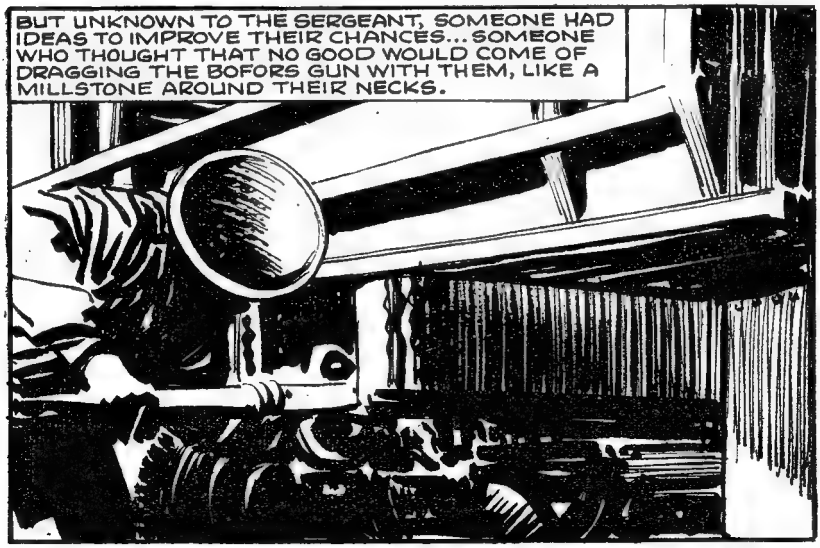
NOT OIL WELLS OR KID'S GAMES... SERGEANT ROLFE HAD PLAYED ANOTHER HAND WITH DEATH — AND WON.
ALL RIGHT! DRIVE FORWARD NOW, ADAMS.


WEARILY, ROLFE ROSE TO HIS FEET, HIS MOUTH AND THROAT DRY WITH REACTION AFTER THE TENSION.
ACHTUNG!
MINEN!

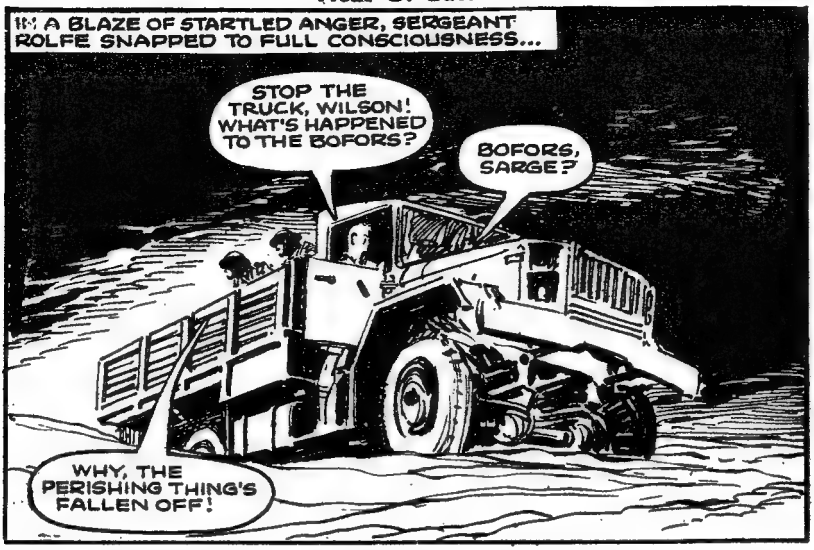
THE GUNNERS SUDDENLY REALISED JUST WHAT HAD BEEN GOING ON... AND WHERE THEY HAD BEEN SO CASUALLY DRIVING.
MINES!
A MINEFIELD! AND WE DROVE STRAIGHT THROUGH!

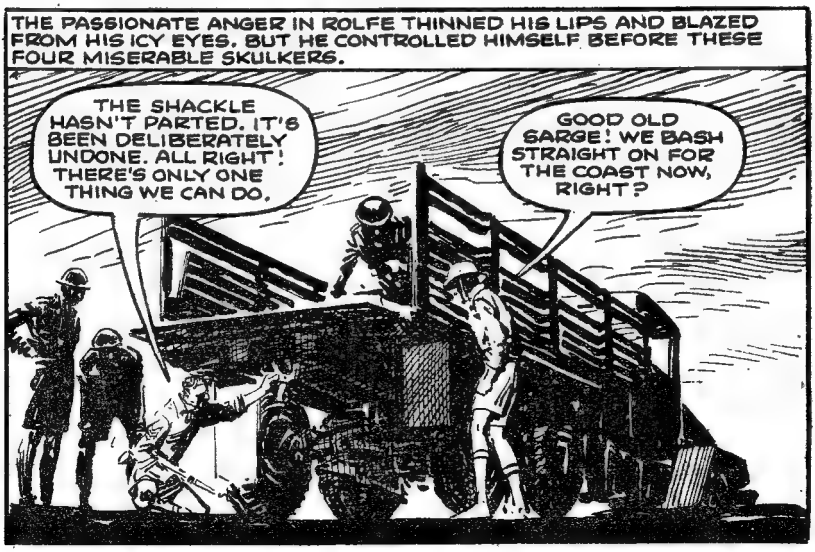
SERGEANT ROLFE LOOKED AT THEM WITH GRIM AMUSEMENT.
YES, THIS IS AN OLD JERRY MINEFIELD. IT RUNS NORTH WEST AND SOUTH EAST AND IT LOOKS TOO DEEP TO TRY TO CROSS. WE'LL HAVE TO SKIRT IT - TO THE SOUTH!

THE SOUTH! DEEPER INTO THE DESERT AND FARTHER AWAY FROM THE COAST AND THE RETREATING EIGHTH ARMY...
I'M DEAD BEAT. THINK I'LL TRY TO CATCH FORTY WINKS. DRIVE PARALLEL TO THE MINEFIELD, ADAMS, BUT GIVE IT A WIDE BERTH.

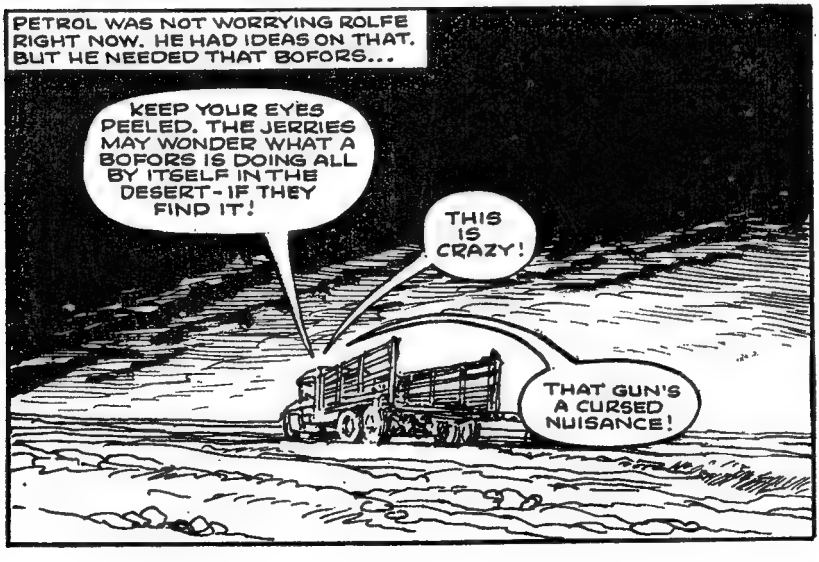

BUT UNKNOWN TO THE SERGEANT, SOMEONE HAD IDEAS TO IMPROVE THEIR CHANCES... SOMEONE WHO THOUGHT THAT NO GOOD WOULD COME OF DRAGGING THE BOFORS GUN WITH THEM, LIKE A MILLSTONE AROUND THEIR NECKS.

I WONDERED WHY YOU SUDDENLY DECIDED TO DRIVE, HOPPY!
WE'RE GOING TO GET THROUGH THIS ALIVE, IN SPITE OF THIS BLOOMING HERO HERE!
DOZING FITFULLY, SERGEANT ROLFE WAS PLAGUED BY EVIL DREAMS, IN WHICH THE CONVICTION GREW ON HIM TO TORTURING PROPORTIONS THAT HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF HIS L.R.D.G. COMRADES...
THAT DEATH'S-HEAD ARMOURED UNIT MUST BE PROWLING AROUND ON THE FLANKS OF THE RETREATING EIGHTH. HE KNEW HE WOULD MEET IT AGAIN... AND THEN HIS DISTURBED MIND GREW AWARE OF ANOTHER SENSATION...
SOMETHING'S DIFFERENT... TRUCK'S RUNNING EASILY...

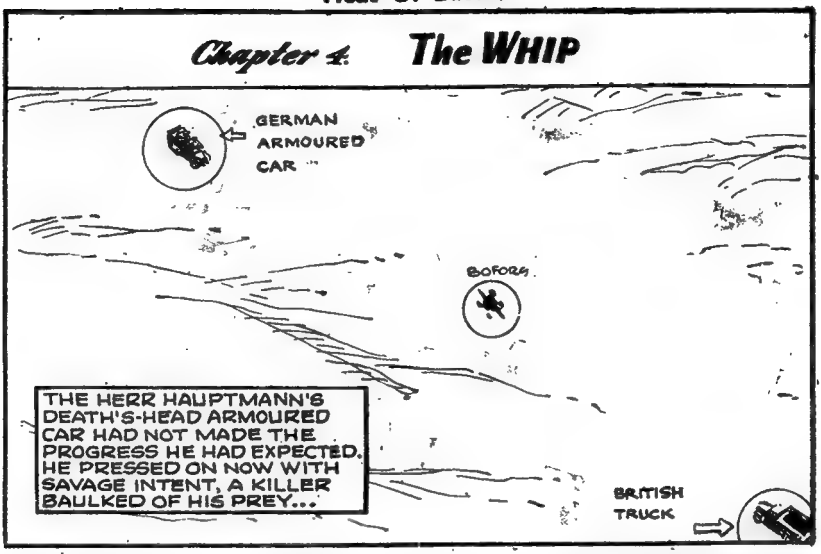

IN A BLAZE OF STARTLED ANGER, SERGEANT ROLFE SNAPPED TO FULL CONSCIOUSNESS...
STOP THE TRUCK, WILSON! WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE BOFORS?
BOFORS, SARGE?
WHY, THE PERISHING THING'S FALLEN OFF!

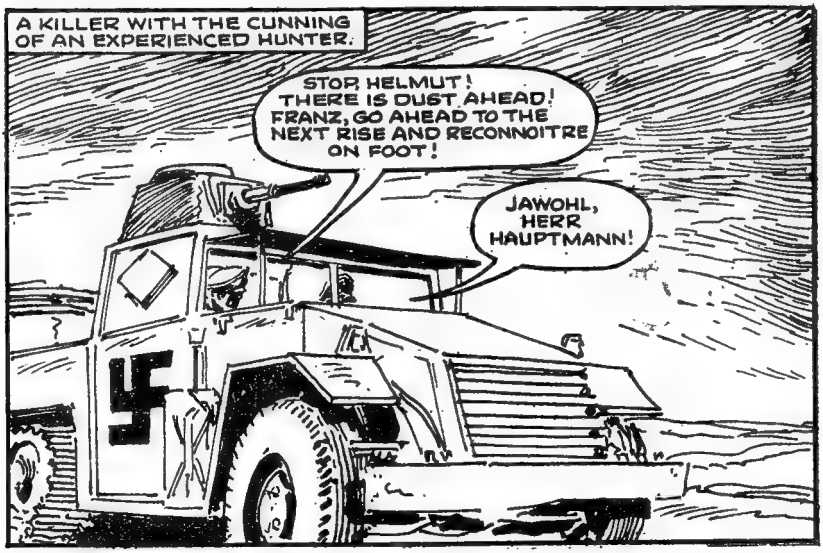

THE PASSIONATE ANGER IN ROLFE THINNED HIS LIPS AND BLAZED FROM HIS ICY EYES. BUT HE CONTROLLED HIMSELF BEFORE THESE FOUR MISERABLE SKULKERS.
THE SHACKLE HASN'T PARTED. IT'S BEEN DELIBERATELY UNDONE. ALL RIGHT! THERE'S ONLY ONE THING WE CAN DO.
GOOD OLD SARGE! WE BASH STRAIGHT ON FOR THE COAST NOW, RIGHT?

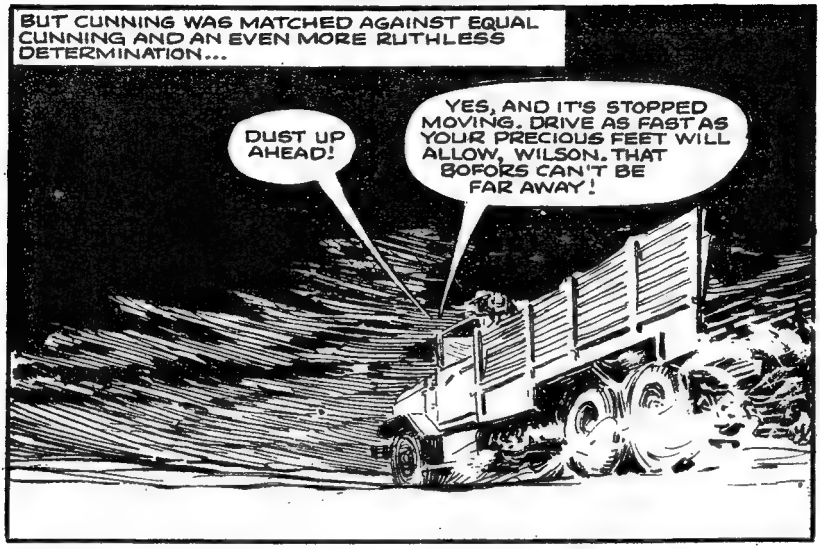
NO USE QUESTIONING THEM, NO USE TRYING TO FIND OUT WHO HAD DONE IT AND WHY THE OTHERS HAD NOT STOPPED THE LORRY.
WRONG WILSON! WE NEED THAT GUN. WE TURN ROUND AND GO BACK FOR IT!
GO BACK? BUT WHAT ABOUT THE PETROL?
OH, NO!


PETROL WAS NOT WORRYING ROLFE RIGHT NOW. HE HAD IDEAS ON THAT. BUT HE NEEDED THAT BOFORS...
KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED. THE JERRIES MAY WONDER WHAT A BOFORS IS DOING ALL BY ITSELF IN THE DESERT - IF THEY FIND IT!
THIS IS CRAZY!
THAT GUN'S A CURSED NUISANCE!

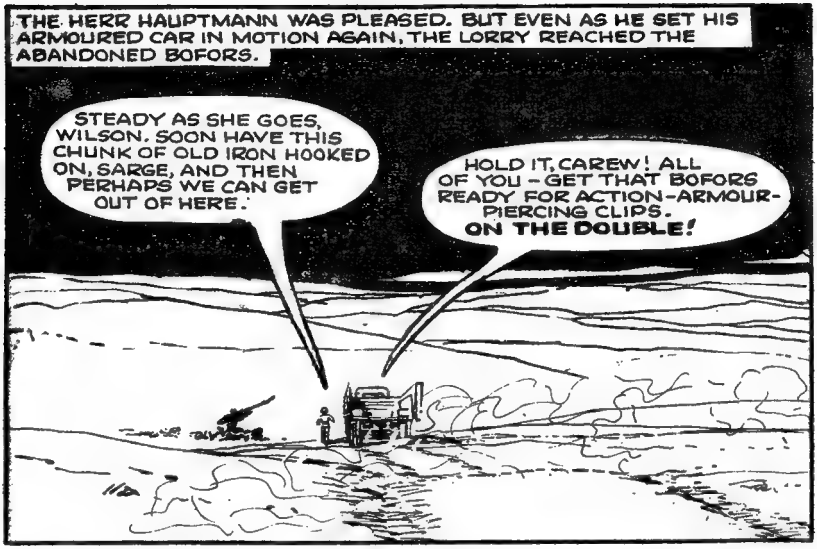
Chapter 4. The WHIP






BUT CUNNING WAS MATCHED AGAINST EQUAL CUNNING AND AN EVEN MORE RUTHLESS DETERMINATION...
DUST UP AHEAD!
YES, AND IT'S STOPPED MOVING. DRIVE AS FAST AS YOUR PRECIOUS FEET WILL ALLOW, WILSON. THAT BOFORS CAN'T BE FAR AWAY!

FRANZ'S EYES WERE IMMEDIATELY ATTRACTED TO THE RACING, DUST-SHROUDED LORRY. HE NOTICED THE BOFORS ONLY AS AN ISOLATED PIECE OF THE WRECKAGE STREWING THE DESERT.
A THIN-SKINNED LORRY WITH ONLY A MACHINE-GUN. THE HERR HAUPTMANN WILL BE PLEASED!

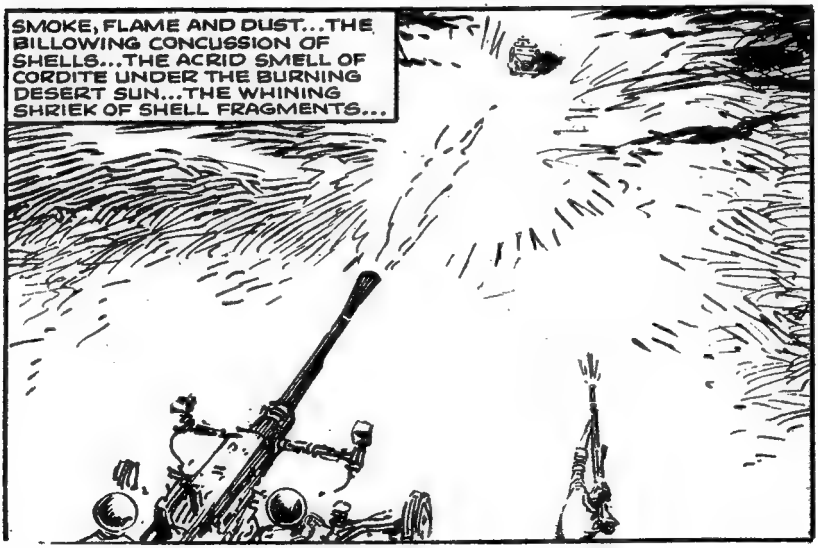

THE HERR HAUPTMANN WAS PLEASED. BUT EVEN AS HE SET HIS ARMOURED CAR IN MOTION AGAIN, THE LORRY REACHED THE ABANDONED BOFORS.
STEADY AS SHE GOES, WILSON. SOON HAVE THIS CHUNK OF OLD IRON HOOKED ON, SARGE, AND THEN PERHAPS WE CAN GET OUT OF HERE.
HOLD IT, CAREW! ALL OF YOU - GET THAT BOFORS READY FOR ACTION - ARMOUR-PIERCING CLIPS. ON THE DOUBLE!

HAZARDOUS MONTHS OF DESERT WARFARE HAD TRAINED SERGEANT ROLFE IN A BITTER SCHOOL.
WE DON'T KNOW WHAT'S OVER THAT RIDGE!
I REALLY THINK WE OUGHT TO CLEAR OUT, SARN'T.
I'M DOING THE THINKING, CAREW! AS SOON AS I GIVE THE WORD, SHOOT - AND SHOOT STRAIGHT!

AGONISING SECONDS TICKED BY – AND DOUBT BEGAN TO TORTURE SERGEANT ROLFE.
SHOULD WE HAVE DRIVEN AWAY? WILL I KILL THESE FOUR AS WELL AS CAPTAIN STANLEY? HANG IT – WE'RE COMMITTED NOW!
A GUN IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE GUNNERS THAT MAN IT...
I WISH I WAS BACK IN THE COOKHOUSE NOW...
I RECKON I COULD SHOOT BETTER'N HOPPY WILSON...
THIS IS ABSOLUTELY CRAZY!
THIS BLINKING SERGEANT WILL KILL US ALL BEFORE HE'S SATISFIED...

PERHAPS THE SERGEANT WAS A LITTLE CRAZY. HE KEPT THINKING OF A DEATH'S-HEAD NAZI ARMOURED UNIT AND OF THE TRUCKS OF HIS FRIENDS EXPLODING IN A TORRENT OF ENEMY SHELLS...
HOLD YOUR FIRE!
AND SO BRITISH AND GERMAN CONFRONTED EACH OTHER...
OPEN FIRE, FRANZ – AND SHOOT TO KILL!
A PLEASURE, HERR HAUPTMANN!

ROLFE STEADIED THE SIGHTS OF THE BREN GUN ON THE ENEMY VEHICLE – HIS VOICE CRACKED FLATLY...
FIRE!

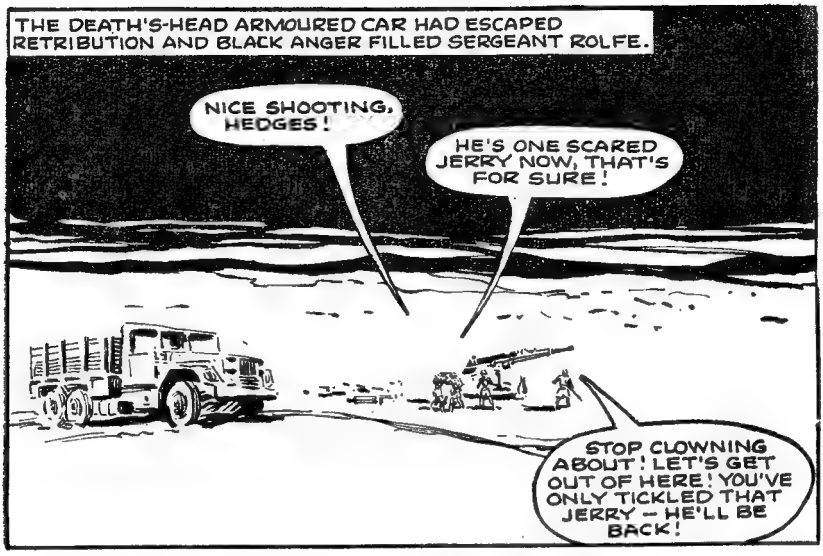

SMOKE, FLAME AND DUST...THE BILLOWING CONCUSSION OF SHELLS...THE ACRID SMELL OF CORDITE UNDER THE BURNING DESERT SUN...THE WHINING SHRIEK OF SHELL FRAGMENTS...

GUNNER HEDGES COULD STAND IT NO LONGER. HE RAMMED THE NEXT CLIP OF ARMOUR-PIERCING SHELLS INTO THE HOPPER AND SHOVED WILSON OFF HIS SEAT.
HEY! WHAT'S THE IDEA?
YOU GRAB THE SHELLS, HOPPY! I'LL HIT THAT JERRY- BUT GOOD!

UNDER GUNNER HEDGES' STEADY CONTROL THE 40MM SHELLS BEGAN TO CLAW IN TOWARDS THE NAZI ARMOURED CAR WHILST ROLFE'S BREN CHATTERED INSANELY, SEEKING THE VULNERABLE SLITS...
HIMMEL! THAT'S ARMOUR-PIERCING!
I'M HIT! I'M HIT!

FOR THE FIRST TIME, LUCK SMILED ON THE MAKE-SHIFT BOFORS GUN CREW...
BACK AWAY, HELMUT! WE CAN'T FACE ARMOUR-PIERCING SHELLS! HURRY!
JAWOHL, HERR HAUPTMANN!

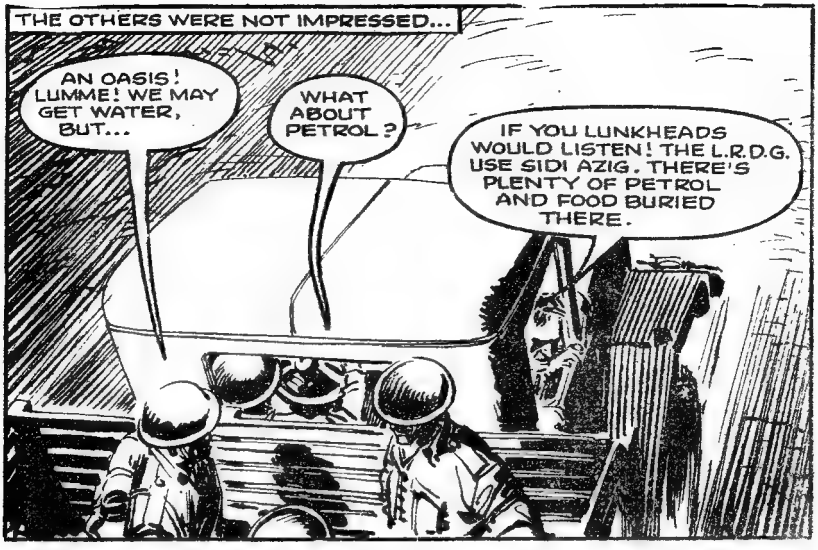
THE CREW OF DODGERS WERE BESIDE THEMSELVES WITH ELATION... FOR THE FIRST TIME THEY WERE ACTUALLY HITTING BACK AT THE ENEMY.
WE'VE GOT HIM! HE'S RUNNING!
OLD HEDGES CAN SHOOT, AFTER ALL...
CEASE FIRE! DON'T WASTE SHELLS!

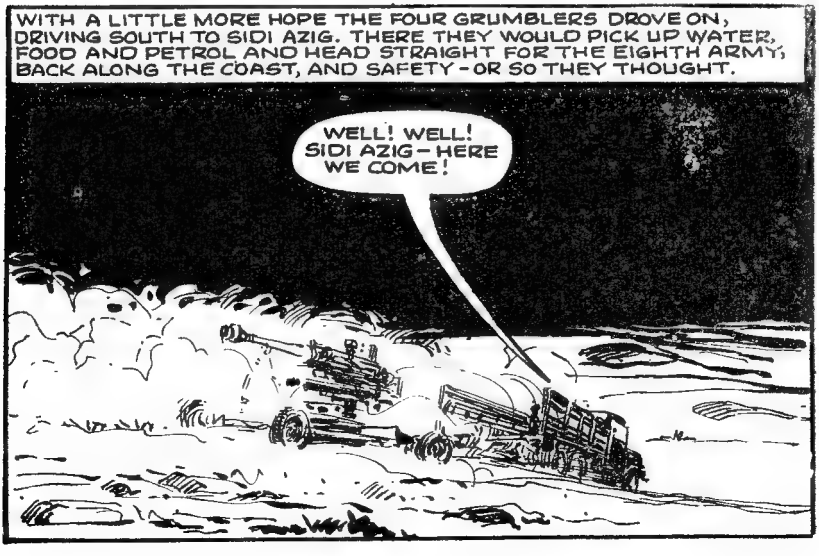

THE DEATH'S-HEAD ARMOURED CAR HAD ESCAPED RETRIBUTION AND BLACK ANGER FILLED SERGEANT ROLFE.
NICE SHOOTING, HEDGES!
HE'S ONE SCARED JERRY NOW, THAT'S FOR SURE!
STOP CLOWNING ABOUT! LET'S GET OUT OF HERE! YOU'VE ONLY TICKLED THAT JERRY – HE'LL BE BACK!

ROLFE EYED HIS MEN SOURLY. THEY SEEMED TO THINK THEY HAD WON A TREMENDOUS VICTORY. HE SOBERED THEM UP – FAST!
GET CRACKING! I WANT TO BE WELL ON THE WAY BEFORE THAT DEATH'S-HEAD STARTS NOSING AFTER US AGAIN – WITH HIS MATES!

SOON THE TRUCK AND BOFORS WERE ROLLING ON AGAIN, SKIRTING THE MINEFIELD. BUT ROLFE WANTED THAT DEATH'S-HEAD CAR TO FOLLOW...
HOW FAR DO YOU THINK WE'LL GET BEFORE THE PETROL GIVES OUT, SARN'T?
AND WHAT DO WE DO THEN?

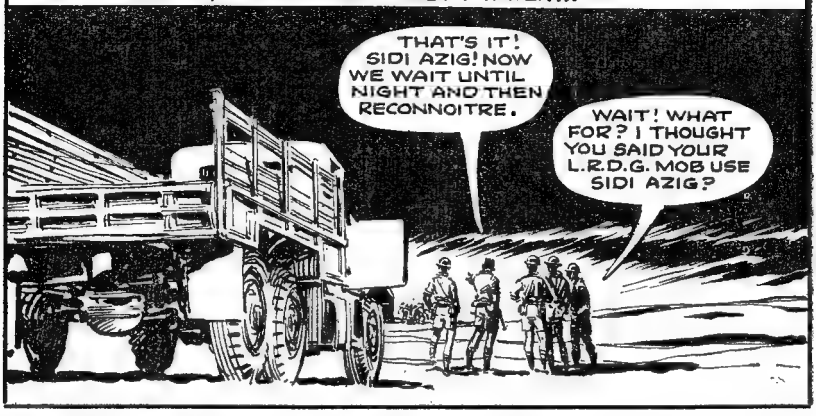
AFTER THAT QUICK, SHARP ENCOUNTER, THE OLD FEARS WERE FLOODING BACK.
I TOLD YOU I HAD AN IDEA ON THAT. THE L.R.D.G. USE A LITTLE OASIS A FEW MILES FROM HERE - SIDI AZIG. I GOT MY BEARINGS FROM THAT MINEFIELD.


THE OTHERS WERE NOT IMPRESSED...
AN OASIS! LUMME! WE MAY GET WATER, BUT...
WHAT ABOUT PETROL?
IF YOU LUNKHEADS WOULD LISTEN! THE L.R.D.G. USE SIDI AZIG. THERE'S PLENTY OF PETROL AND FOOD BURIED THERE.


WITH A LITTLE MORE HOPE THE FOUR GRUMBLERS DROVE ON, DRIVING SOUTH TO SIDI AZIG. THERE THEY WOULD PICK UP WATER, FOOD AND PETROL AND HEAD STRAIGHT FOR THE EIGHTH ARMY, BACK ALONG THE COAST, AND SAFETY - OR SO THEY THOUGHT.
WELL! WELL! SIDI AZIG - HERE WE COME!

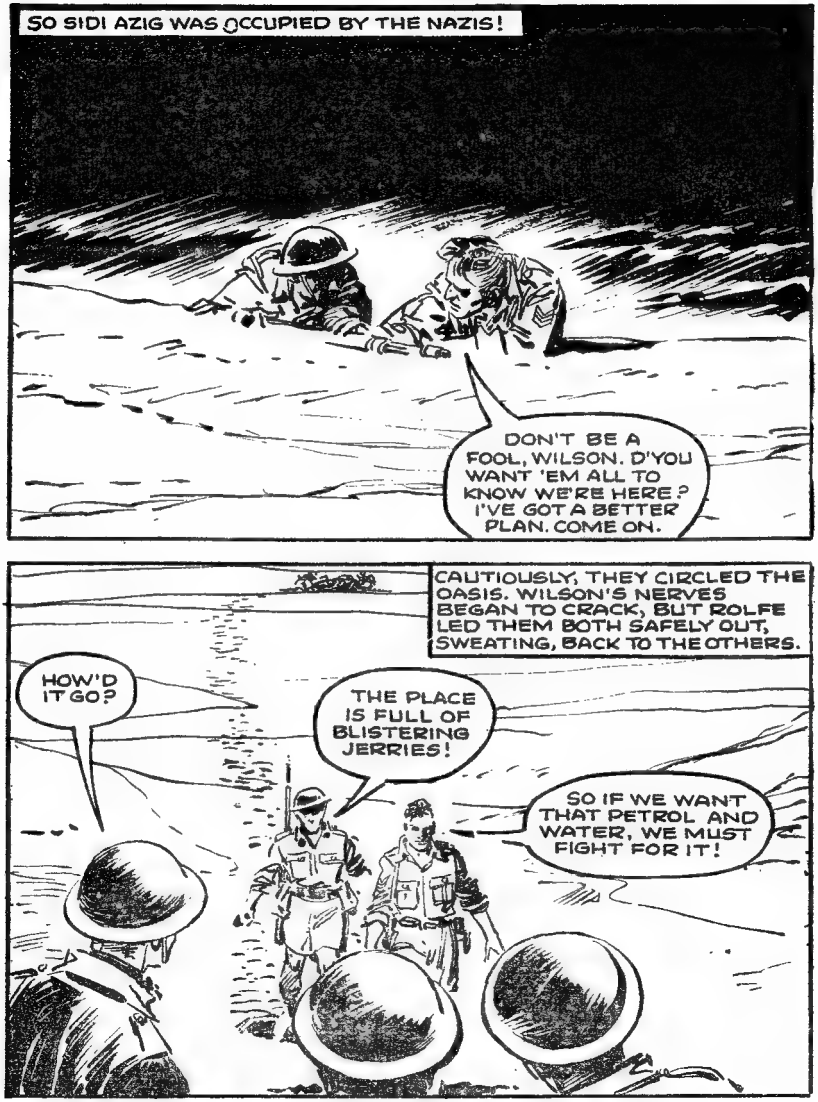
Chapter 5. The Final Test

WITH THE LAST DREGS OF PETROL SWILLING IN THE TANKS, THE TRUCK CAME WITHIN SIGHT OF SIDI AZIG. A CLUSTER OF PALM TREES, A PATCH OF THORNY SCRUB, A TINY POOL OF MUDDY WATER...

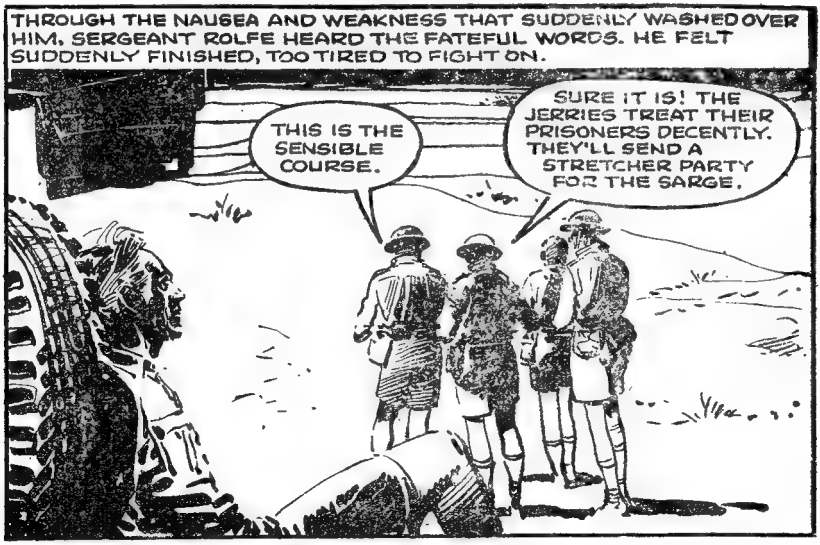


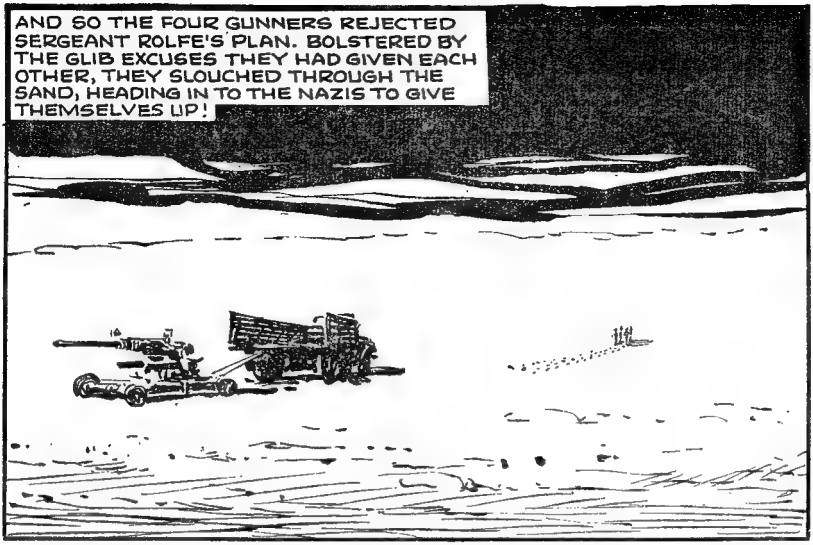
SERGEANT ROLFE'S VOICE WAS QUIET AND MEANINGFUL...

THE OTHER THREE DODGERS LOST THEIR SMILES AT SERGEANT ROLFE'S BARBED WORDS.
THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE BOTHERING OUR GALLANT SERGEANT.
LIKE COMMITTING A SPECTACULAR SUICIDE?
YEAH - AND TAKING ME ALONG WITH HIM!
THAT NIGHT SERGEANT ROLFE AND GUNNER HOPPY WILSON SLIPPED STEALTHILY TOWARDS SIDI AZIG. THE NIGHT WAS STILL HOT AND CLOSE.
HOLD IT! SOMEONE UP AHEAD! A JERRY!
I SEE HIM. I CAN PLUG HIM FROM HERE...


SO SIDI AZIG WAS OCCUPIED BY THE NAZIS!
DON'T BE A FOOL, WILSON. D'YOU WANT 'EM ALL TO KNOW WE'RE HERE? I'VE GOT A BETTER PLAN. COME ON.
CAUTIOUSLY, THEY CIRCLED THE OASIS. WILSON'S NERVES BEGAN TO CRACK, BUT ROLFE LED THEM BOTH SAFELY OUT, SWEATING, BACK TO THE OTHERS.
HOW'D IT GO?
THE PLACE IS FULL OF BLISTERING JERRIES!
SO IF WE WANT THAT PETROL AND WATER, WE MUST FIGHT FOR IT!

SHEER SHOCKED DISBELIEF HAMMERED AT THE GUNNERS. NO PETROL, WATER RUNNING OUT, STRANDED IN THE DESERT, THEIR HOPES WERE NIL.
IT WOULD BE MADNESS TO FIGHT!
I AGREE... THEY'VE GOT A PANZER IN THERE! THERE'S ONLY ONE THING WE CAN DO NOW... SURRENDER!
BEING A PRISONER OF WAR IS BETTER THAN DYING IN THIS DESERT!


THROUGH THE NAUSEA AND WEAKNESS THAT SUDDENLY WASHED OVER HIM, SERGEANT ROLFE HEARD THE FATEFUL WORDS. HE FELT SUDDENLY FINISHED, TOO TIRED TO FIGHT ON.
THIS IS THE SENSIBLE COURSE.
SURE IT IS! THE JERRIES TREAT THEIR PRISONERS DECENTLY. THEY'LL SEND A STRETCHER PARTY FOR THE SARGE.

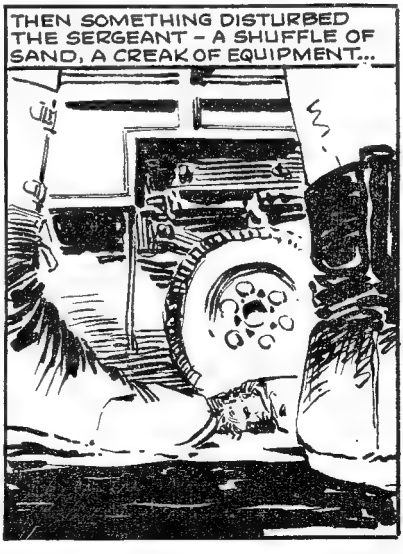

AND SO THE FOUR GUNNERS REJECTED SERGEANT ROLFE'S PLAN. BOLSTERED BY THE GLIB EXCUSES THEY HAD GIVEN EACH OTHER, THEY SLOUCHED THROUGH THE SAND, HEADING IN TO THE NAZIS TO GIVE THEMSELVES UP!

ALL RIGHT, SCUTTLE, YOU RATS! AND GIVE MY REGARDS TO THAT DEATH'S-HEAD CAR IN THERE...

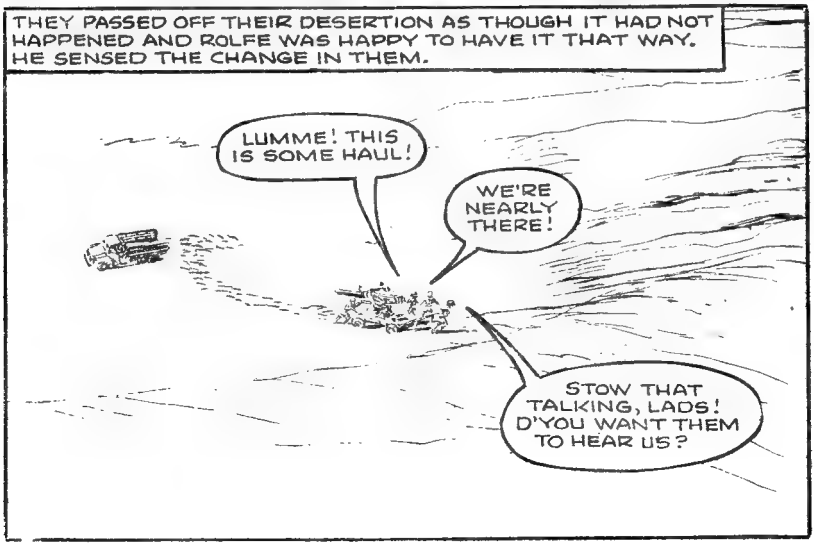
EXHAUSTION OVERTOOK THE TOUGH SERGEANT AND HE SLUMPED TO THE SAND - BEATEN.

MEANWHILE, BESIDE THE OASIS POOL, THE HERR HAUPTMANN WAS PACING RESTLESSLY. HIS HUNTER'S INSTINCTS WERE AROUSED...
I HAVE AN ITCHY FEELING, MULLER. THE BRITISH ARE PROWLING TONIGHT.
IT'S ALL QUIET, HERR HAUPTMANN. THE SENTRIES ARE ALERT. THE BRITISH ARE RUNNING LIKE RATS ALL THE WAY TO CAIRO.

OUT IN THE VELVETY DARKNESS OF THE DESERT, SERGEANT ROLFE LAY EXHAUSTED AND SPENT ON THE DESERT SAND.


THEN SOMETHING DISTURBED THE SERGEANT – A SHUFFLE OF SAND, A CREAK OF EQUIPMENT...

A MIRAGE? DELIRIUM? QUICK, SAVAGE HOPE BLOSSOMED IN ROLFE AS HE SAT UP AND LOOKED AROUND HIM.
FEELING BETTER NOW, SARN'T?
WE HAD A DEKKO AT THE JERRIES. YOUR ARMOURED CAR'S THERE, ALL RIGHT.


THEY PASSED OFF THEIR DESERTION AS THOUGH IT HAD NOT HAPPENED AND ROLFE WAS HAPPY TO HAVE IT THAT WAY. HE SENSED THE CHANGE IN THEM.
LUMME! THIS IS SOME HAUL!
WE'RE NEARLY THERE!
STOW THAT TALKING, LADS! D'YOU WANT THEM TO HEAR US?

THE BOFORS WAS SET UP IN A SPOT ROLFE INDICATED. HIS THROAT WAS DRY NOW WITH MORE THAN DESERT SAND...
YOU'LL SEE MY GRENADE. THAT'S YOUR AIMING POINT. DAWN'S NOT FAR OFF. JUST KEEP THAT PANZER QUIET...
YOU LEAVE IT TO US, SARGE. AND - GOOD LUCK!

HEART THUMPING HEAVILY WITHIN HIM, THE DESERT RAT, ROLFE, LED HOPPY WILSON PAST THE NAZI SENTRIES. THEY WERE IN SIDI AZIG! THE NAZIS SLUMBERED...
WATCH FOR THOSE SENTRIES BEHIND US, HOPPY. THE BALLOON'S ABOUT TO GO UP!
RIGHT, SARGE!

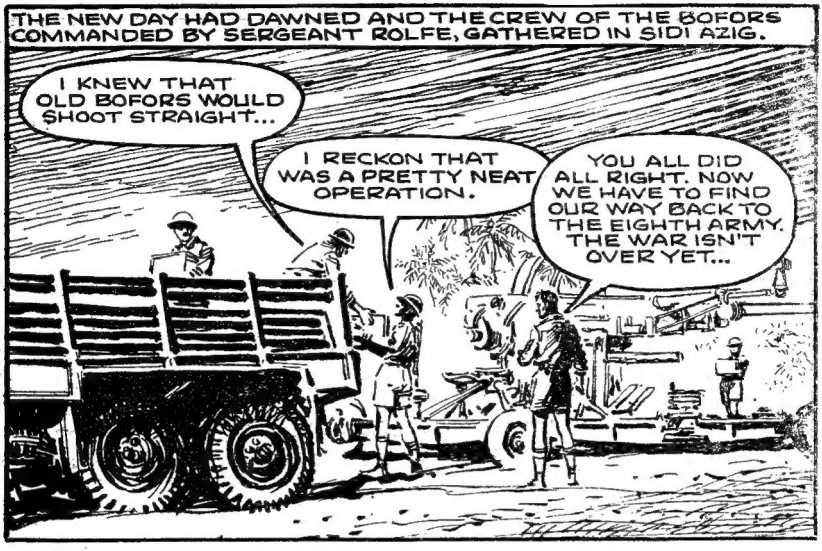
Heat Of Battle

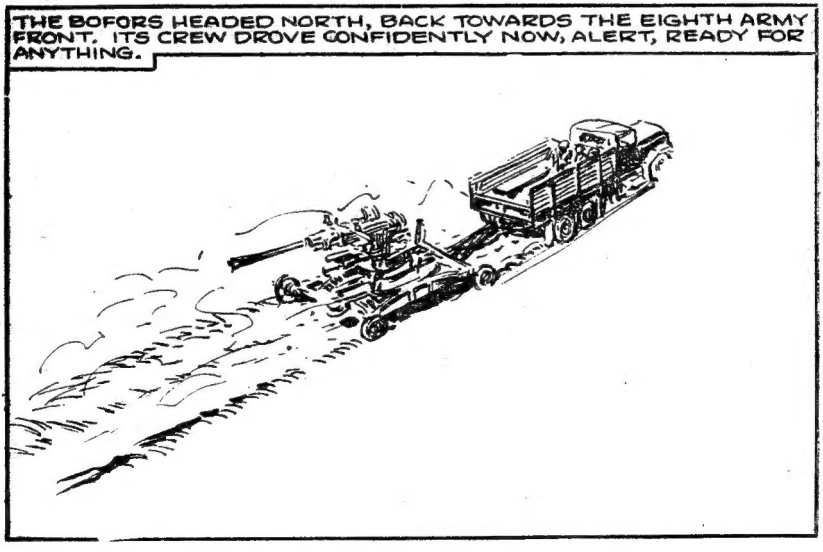
BUT THE NAZIS REACTED SWIFTLY...
THAT'S THE NAZI I WANT! THE COMMANDER OF THE DEATH'S-HEAD CAR!

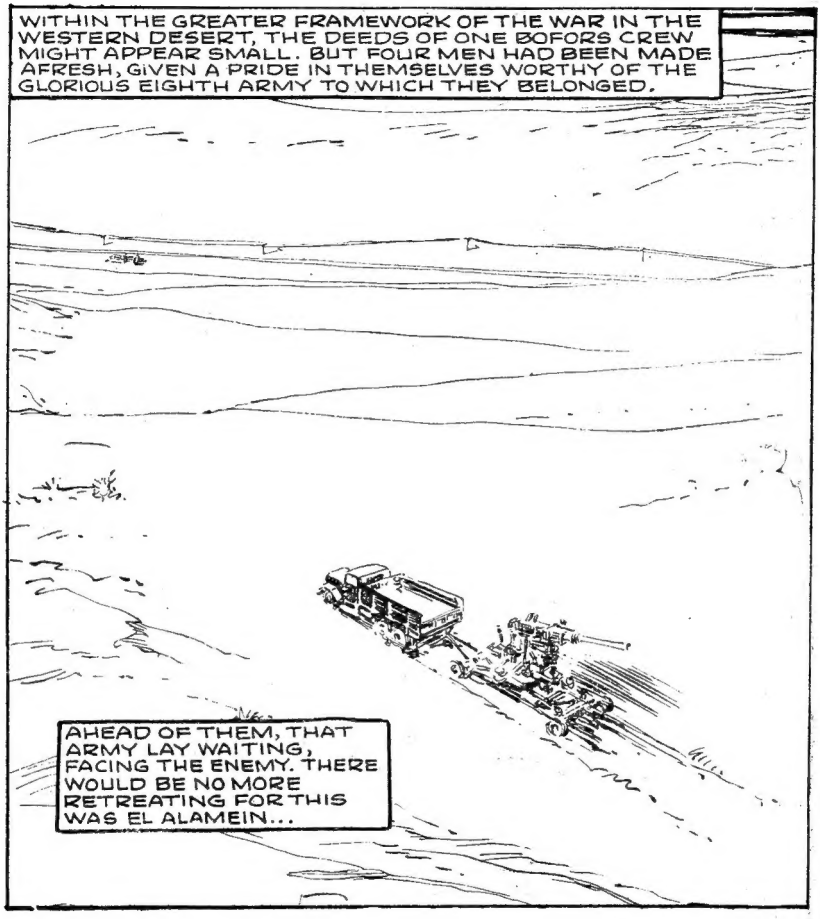
THE DEADLY FIRE OF BREN AND TOMMY GUN AT LAST SILENCED THE ENEMY IN THE OASIS AND THE BOFORS SMASHED THE VITALS OF THE ARMOURED CAR TO WHICH THE GERMAN OFFICER HAD BEEN RUNNING.
TAKE IT EASY, SARGE. HE'S GOT A MACHINE-GUN!
SO HAVE I!

ACRID FUMES SWIRLED ACROSS THE LITTLE POOL AS THE NAZI OFFICER AND THE BRITISH SERGEANT FOUGHT IT OUT TO THE BITTER END...

THE BLACK FURY THAT HAD SMOULDERED IN ROLFE BURST NOW IN VIOLENT ACTION AS HIS BULLETS FOUND THE FLEEING GERMAN. CAPTAIN STANLEY AND HIS FRIENDS OF THE L.R.D.G. COULD REST IN PEACE...


THE NEW DAY HAD DAWNED AND THE CREW OF THE BOFORS COMMANDED BY SERGEANT ROLFE, GATHERED IN SIDI AZIG.
I KNEW THAT OLD BOFORS WOULD SHOOT STRAIGHT...
I RECKON THAT WAS A PRETTY NEAT OPERATION.
YOU ALL DID ALL RIGHT. NOW WE HAVE TO FIND OUR WAY BACK TO THE EIGHTH ARMY. THE WAR ISN'T OVER YET...


THE BOFORS HEADED NORTH, BACK TOWARDS THE EIGHTH ARMY FRONT. ITS CREW DROVE CONFIDENTLY NOW, ALERT, READY FOR ANYTHING.



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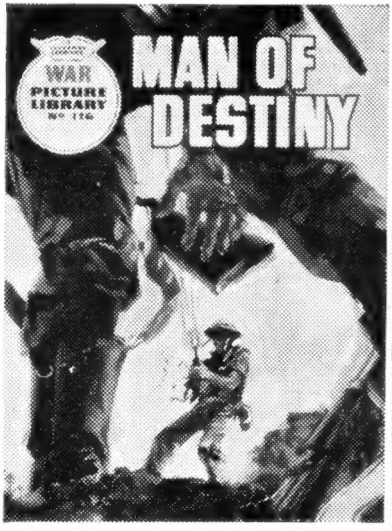
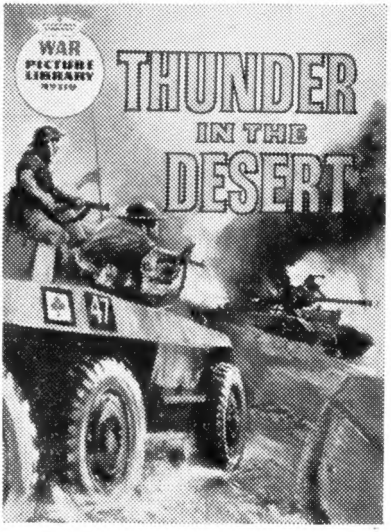


1943. For Private Poppoli the war should have been over—but it had only just begun !

No. 119.—THUNDER IN THE DESERT



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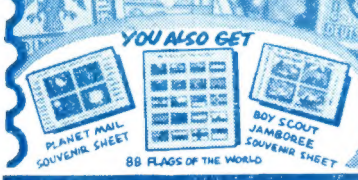
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